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In Pictures

The global game caught on camera

SPAIN...Villarreal's Alexandre Pato (in yellow) and Sergio Busquets of Barcelona clash in La Liga

ENGLAND... Arsenal's Alexis Sanchez rues a missed chance away to Bournemouth

DENMARK...Brondby's Tobias Noer flies through the air during a pre-season friendly against KFUM Roskilde

EGYPT...Ali Gabr (centre) and Hosny Fathy of Zamalek challenge Al Ahly's Marwan Mohsen in the Cairo derby

GERMANY...Schalke players and staff emerge from an elevator during a visit to the Prosper Haniel mine

GABON...Mali fans await the start of their team's opening African Nations Cup game against Egypt

USA...Mario Pineida of Ecuadorian side Barcelona SC (in yellow) collides with Leonardo Campana of Millonarios from Colombia

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FROM THE EDITOR

A new year and lots of stories to discuss this month, not least the expansion of the World Cup to 48 teams and Marco Van Basten's attempts to provoke a discussion about changes to the Laws of the Game.

But we have chosen to focus heavily on RB Leipzig (page 50) and the issue of multi-club ownership (page 58) because it touches on one of the fundamental questions of the game: who owns football?

> The issue of multi-club ownership touches on one of the fundamental questions of the game: who owns football?

Controversial owners are nothing new in the game, of course, but the emergence of RB Leipzig has brought the issue of multi-club ownership sharply into focus. Leipzig have circumvented the Bundesliga's "50+1" rule, which is designed to prevent corporations owning clubs and, in theory, keep fans in control. But more than that, Red Bull's global network of clubs raises all sorts of ethical and sporting questions.

We have only touched on some aspects of multi-national club ownership. The Glazer family and the speculator-owners in the Premier League deserve renewed attention, as does the new wave of Chinese investors – even if China is trying to force clubs to curb their spending (page 86).

Gavin Hamilton, Editor

10 SIGNIFICANT EVENTS THIS MONTH

1 FIFA votes to expand World Cup finals to 48 teams p14
2 Van Basten proposes shake-up of football's rule book p13
3 Champions League knockout stage kicks off p38
4 Curbs on Chinese clubs' spending p86
5 Former England manager Graham Taylor dies p18
6 Future of Steaua Bucharest in doubt p88
7 South American Under-20 Championship p90
8 Julian Draxler heads the transfer-window movers p19
9 Carlos Queiroz quits Iran again p19
10 Trouble brewing in Cyprus p26

SWITZERLAND

World Cup grows to 48 teams as Van Basten floats revolutionary ideas

The first FIFA Council meeting of 2017 agreed unanimously to a proposal from president Gianni Infantino to increase the number of World Cup finalists from 32 to 48, starting in 2026.

The expanded competition will feature 16 first-round groups of three teams, with the possibility of draws being settled by penalties. A knockout stage of 32 teams will enable FIFA to complete the tournament within 32 days.

"We are in the 21st century and we have to shape the World Cup of the 21st century," said Infantino. "It is the future. Football is more than just Europe and South America, football is global."

Meanwhile, Marco Van Basten, FIFA's new technical director, floated several ideas for rule changes that could revolutionise the game. The former Holland international's proposals, included:

- abolishing offside
- "orange cards" and sin bins brought in to replace yellow cards
- hockey-style shoot-outs, with eight-second run-ups, instead of penalties to decide draws
- players being forced to leave the pitch after they have committed five fouls

"A catastrophic move. I've the impression that it's only about money. The quality will be watered down"

Increasing the number of World Cup finalists to 48 in 2026 leaves Hans-Joachim Watzke, Borussia Dortmund CEO, hot under the collar

Offside...Argentina's Gonzalo Higuain in the World Cup Final

- a maximum of 60 games for players in a season
- rolling substitutions in youth matches
- additional substitutions in extra-time

Speaking in the days following the decision to expand the World Cup, Van Basten said: "That's all for money, but we have to think about football and not money. For a lot of clubs that's not easy. But there is enough money in football.

"Ronaldo and Messi are earning so much money. If they are earning a little bit less but performing better that's good for football."

Van Basten, who was appointed by Infantino last year, added: "We have to promote quality instead of quantity. We are playing too much football now.

"We have to defend players because they have to play so much and are not fresh or fit anymore."

He also questioned the wisdom of the offside rule, saying: "I think it can be very interesting watching a game without offside.

"Football now is already looking a lot like handball with nine or 10 defenders in front of the goal. It's difficult for the opposition to score a goal."

Van Basten's ideas have yet to be discussed at any level by the game's rule-making body, the International FA Board.

Ideas...Van Basten

HEROES & VILLAINS

KAZUYOSHI MIURA

Veteran...Kazuyoshi Miura

The Japanese striker signed a deal with second-tier side Yokohama that will take him past his 50th birthday, having made his professional debut in 1986.

ALBERT GUDMUNDSSON

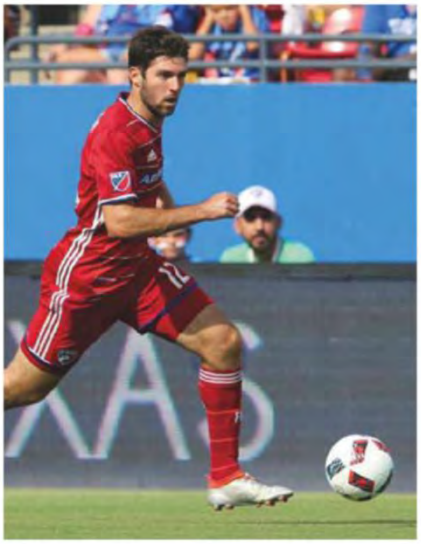
Coming on as a sub for his senior international debut in the final minute of Iceland's 2-0 victory against China, the 19-year-old PSV midfielder followed in the footsteps of father Gudmundur Benediktsson (1996–2001, 10 caps), mother Kristbjorg Ingadottir (1996, four caps), maternal grandfather Ingi Bjorn Albertsson (1971–79, 15 caps) and maternal great grandfather, also Albert Gudmundsson (1946–58, six caps).

BESART BERISHA

The Melbourne Victory forward's goal against Newcastle Jets made him the A-League's top scorer of all-time, on 91, breaking the record he previously shared with Archie Thompson.

RYAN HOLLINGSHEAD

The Dallas defender was courageously assisting another driver who had been involved in a road accident when he was struck by another car, that skidded on the icy surface, leaving him with three fractured vertebrae and in a neck brace for two months.



Accident...Ryan Hollingshead was hit by a car

SERBIAN CLUBS

World players union FIFPro released figures showing that 68 per cent of players in Serbia do not receive their salaries on time, while 89 per cent of players who are transferred for a fee say they were pressured into moving.

Sub-standard...Zimbabwe players made complaints

ZIMBABWE FA

The country's preparations ahead of the African Nations Cup were thrown into chaos by a row over accommodation and financial issues, with the squad unable to train at the National Sports Stadium in Harare because a $60 fee had not been paid. The players then refused to stay at the Zifa Village training facility because they felt it was sub-standard.

PARTIZAN BELGRADE

The Serbian club have been banned from the Champions League and Europa League for the next three seasons because of unpaid debts.

Missing out...Cedric Gogoua (left) of Partizan Belgrade

PERE GRATACOS

Barcelona sacked their director of training and education at Camp Nou after he said of Lionel Messi: "Without Neymar, Luis Suarez, Iniesta, Pique and the others, he wouldn't be such a good player."

"Thank you for having voted me. My gratitude goes to my friends and especially to myself because I was the one who worked hard, wasn't I?"

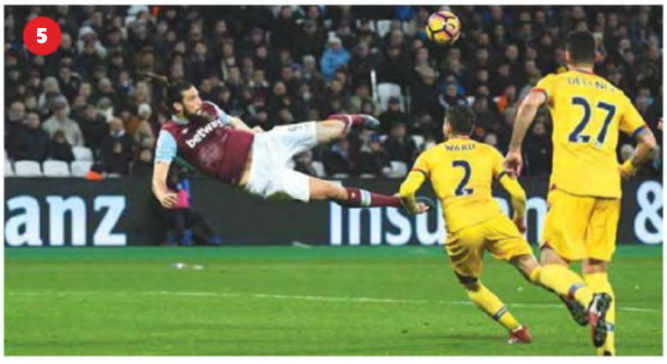
Gabriel Tamas, Steaua's modest 33-year-old centre-back, on being named Romanian players' union's defender of the year for 2016

GOALS we'd like to see again

To see video footage of these goals, and many more that we have selected, scan the QR code using any free QR reader that can be downloaded to your smartphone. You can also see the videos by logging on to http://po.st/gWR1LV

1 JULIAN DRAXLER
Paris Saint-Germain v Bastia
Times his run perfectly, following an exchange of passes with Hatem Ben Arfa, and then delicately chips the Bastia goalkeeper on his PSG debut.

2 OLIVIER GIROUD
Arsenal v Crystal Palace
On the break from an opposition corner, he meets a cross from the left with an improvised scorpion kick into the top corner.



3 BENJAMIN MOUKANDJO
Cameroon v Burkina Faso
Curls a delightful free-kick into the far top corner from the right side of the goal.

4 LUIS SUAREZ
Barcelona v Athletic Bilbao
Adjusts his position superbly to volley in a cross by Neymar.

5 ANDY CARROLL
West Ham v Crystal Palace
Spectacular overhead kick into the top corner of the net.

6 DIMITRI PETRATOS
Brisbane Roar v Melbourne Victory
Hits a stunning free-kick with pace from 35 yards into the top corner.

WINNERS

CARLOS TEVEZ
On a reported £615,000 a week at Shanghai Shenhua, the Argentinian is said to be the world's best-paid player.

THE NEW SAINTS
The Welsh Premier League side broke Ajax's world record as they won their 27th top-flight league game in a row.

MIGUEL BORJA
Atletico Nacional's striker became the first Colombian-based South American Football of the Year since Carlos Valderrama in 1993.

MARTIN ODEGAARD
The Real Madrid youngster failed to break into the first team and was sent out on an 18-month loan to Heerenveen in Holland.

PEP GUARDIOLA
Suffered the worst league defeat of his managerial career when Manchester City were beaten 4-0 at Everton.

BOB BRADLEY
The first American to manage a club in the Premier League, he lasted a grand total of 85 days in charge of Swansea City.

LOSERS

Paul GARDNER

THE WORLDWIDE VIEW

Freeing football of the 'Scrooge' factor

Danger...goalkeeper Tim Howard of Colorado Rapids saves at the feet of New York City's Thomas McNamara

I have been wondering for well over a decade, in this column and elsewhere, whether there is anyone in an authoritative position in football who actually cares about the game? Well, suddenly, it seems that there is.

The usually not-too-voluble Marco Van Basten has broken the silence, arguing: "We must keep looking for ways to improve the game, to make it more honest, more dynamic, more interesting, so that what we offer is attractive enough."

As Van Basten is now FIFA's chief officer for technical development, the statement is of the highest significance. At last, someone who matters is paying attention to the state of the game. "The spectators," he says, "want to see action, goals, tackles."

Having stepped into the limelight as a rather unlikely pioneer, Van Basten then fluffs his lines by presenting a list of rule changes that he considers worth looking at.

Sad to say, the list is a grab bag of "cures" that have either already been tried and found wanting (abolishing offside; shoot-outs to replace regular penalty kicks) or have built-in weaknesses (the sin bin; more substitutions).

More promising were his suggestions to counter time-wasting in the final 10 minutes of a game and copying basketball's system of allowing players only a certain number of fouls after which they must be replaced.

I think there is a common theme to Van Basten's suggested rule changes: low-scoring games. And that's where the remedial therapy should start, with a determined attempt to alter the reigning mentality of the game, which is a "Scrooge" mentality.

With Scrooge in the driving seat, a pro-defence, anti-goal mindset has hijacked football to the point where goals are beginning to look like an endangered species. Take a look at the sport's recent big Finals: the 2014 World Cup, the 2016 Copa America, the Olympics, the European Championship, the Champions League and the USA's Major League Soccer.

Six showcase games, all of which went to extra-time – and we got only six goals. Four of the games had to be decided with the fake goals of a penalty shoot-out – and Seattle Sounders, while winning the MLS title, didn't even get a single shot on goal!

You could even be forgiven for believing that this is what football actually wants as it is a sport that quite deliberately makes scoring a rarity. Now we can see, thanks to the goal-line technology graphics, the absurdity of denying a goal even when 99.9 per cent of the ball is over the goal line.

That is the Scrooge mentality. But to get rid of it does not require rule changes. It needs the sport, and particularly referees, to banish the pro-defence bias under which the benefit of doubt is always given to defenders. This bias – a bias with no justification at all – is seen at its most blatant in the way that referees consistently ignore goalkeeper fouls.

Goalkeepers, the ultra-defensive players, are allowed to jump, knee raised, into opponents (specifically forbidden in the rules) or to throw themselves at an opponent's feet (clearly "playing in a dangerous manner", in which the danger is to the goalkeeper himself).

These are dangerous and obvious fouls. Yet the calls are virtually never made. More often than not it is the attacking player who gets penalised – a ludicrous outcome that emphasises just how much the mean-spirited Scrooge mentality distorts the sport.

Anti-goal Scrooge football feeds off itself. A low-scoring sport puts pressure on referees, in particular it explains why referees – not wanting to "decide" the game with a single penalty – turn down so many penalty appeals.

> Seattle Sounders, while winning the MLS title, didn't even get a single shot on goal

Which, of course, encourages defenders to make dodgy tackles. And when goals are hard to come by, the tie-breaker looms.

If referees were to apply the same diligence to punishing cynical defensive fouls as they do during their diving witch-hunts, the sport would be a lot better off.

Rule changes – maybe some of Van Basten's suggestions – will be needed to return football to its full glory. But first the sport must banish Scrooge and recapture its attacking, goal-scoring brio.

The rules to do that are already in place. It is up to the referees to enforce them. WS

Keir RADNEDGE

THE INSIDER

Bigger but not better

A 48-team World Cup will raise more cash but will be low on quality

Sir Stanley Rous would probably have approved of a 48-team World Cup as, for all the colonial baggage that accompanied him on his 13-year FIFA reign, he believed the World Cup was the prime means for taking and growing the game around the planet.

It was Rous, decades ahead of 2002, who urged Japan to set World Cup hosting as a long-term target for the game's development. And, for all the other contentious issues, a 48-team World Cup can promote the game as never before.

Admittedly anything enacted by FIFA should be treated with scepticism after the corruption-fired years of cosy Blatterism bequeathed such a poisonous legacy of disgust and distaste. But hysterical wailing about the end of the wonderful World Cup as we know it is not merely to ignore the tournament's history and original purpose but raises suspicions that the twisted power of one-eyed, old-world protectionism lives on.

The World Cup was envisaged as a 16-team event by Jules Rimet in a very different world back in 1930 – although only 13 teams would take part in the first tournament, in Uruguay. Not until 1982 was Joao Havelange empowered to enforce expansion because, essentially, Europe and South America were not prepared to relinquish any slots. And with an ability to expand having been proven, the step up to 32 teams in 1998 was a no-brainer.

Climax...Brazil keeper Claudio Taffarel celebrates after Italy's Roberto Baggio misses in the 1994 World Cup Final penalty shoot-out

Nine...there isn't space for all Yugoslavia's scorers against Zaire in 1974

In 2026, there will be 48 teams in 16 groups of three, with the top two sides going into the knockout stage. This will mean 80 games instead of 64, but the finals will still only last for 32 days and there will be the same maximum of seven games for the teams who reach the last four.

Serious arguments against expansion do exist, including a universal mistrust of FIFA's financial greed, a distrust of Gianni Infantino's pursuit of re-election as president in 2019 and – above all – the issue of the quality of the football.

FIFA's financial and political rectitude will remain open to question for years, but money for development projects remains a major theme. With Infantino having promised the federations an increase, a 48-team World Cup is projected to bring in an extra $1billion in revenue, as more teams from more countries will help to raise broadcast revenue, which is still FIFA's largest income source.

As for Infantino, his re-election prospects have been enhanced. After all, how often does a candidate in any sphere of politics come good on both his major promises inside a year of being elected?

From a football perspective, there is a worry about the quality of an enlarged World Cup. But, frankly, what quality?

Brazil 2014 was a decent finals, but

South Africa 2010 was dire ("Like a visit to the dentist," said Alex Ferguson), Italy 1990 was poor and Germany 2006 was memorable more for the party atmosphere around the football than the games themselves.

Look at some of the climatic Final matches over the last two decades: 1994 and 2006 went to penalties (the former after a goalless draw), while 1990, 2010 and 2014 were all decided by one goal.

At its inception, the World Cup was to produce a champion for a professional game which had grown out beyond the Olympic Games forum. But those were the days when international football was superior to the club game – and those days have long gone.

Maybe the mid-1970s were the pinnacle of the old game, when West Germany and Holland were Bayern Munich and Ajax. Brazil in 1982 were, perhaps, the last, great national team.

Self-serving...FIFA president Gianni Infantino already has an eye on his re-election campaign

The best football in the world has not been evident at the World Cup for maybe 20 years. Instead, it's to be found every spring in the knockout phase of the Champions League. Barcelona, for example, always played better football than Spain, who were European champions in 2008 and 2012, either side of their World Cup win – although Barca did have Lionel Messi and Spain did not.

Hence the argument about World Cup quality is even more spurious now than ever it was in the days when Mexico played 14 games at five successive World Cups, losing 10 of them, conceding 33 goals and scoring nine. And then there were the times when Hungary scored 10 goals against El Salvador, in 1982, and nine against South Korea, in 1954. In 1974, Yugoslavia plundered nine against Zaire.

Were those great days of an elite World Cup? Hardly. But very few journalists from back then survive to bear witness to the reality of yesteryear.

It's true that the quality of the European Championship nose-dived last summer with an expansion from 16 teams to 24. The consolations, if they may be described as such, were the questionable "romances" of Iceland and Wales, and the rekindling spark in a previously repetitious and boring qualifying competition.

Best...Barcelona in 2011

Giving more teams a chance of reaching the finals will raise the excitement for anticipation for a full 15 to 18 months of qualifying. And this will apply to all six FIFA regions for an expanded World Cup. For all the extra teams that will actually compete in the finals, two or three times as many will also have come closer to the holy grail than they could ever have dreamed.

From a football perspective, there is a worry about the quality of an enlarged World Cup. But, frankly, what quality?

Pinnacle...Ajax's Johan Neeskens (left) and Uli Hoeness of Bayern Munich

That has to be for the good of the game in such a highly competitive sports/leisure/commercial world.

One further factor which went under the radar amid the hot air of horror provoked on an icy day in Zurich concerns hosting.

The likelihood that 2026 will be staged in the United States with Canada and/or Mexico masked the obvious fact that only a handful of single countries can ever now hope to stage the finals. This means that the future of staging a World Cup will be co-hosting – the 2030 centenary tournament in Uruguay and Argentina, and maybe Chile, for example.

Immediately, here are two small countries with great football traditions (Uruguay and Chile) who could never even have contemplated bidding for a 32-team cup but can now dream of sharing a 48-team finals. And the same applies all around the world.

Sir Stanley Rous would certainly have approved. WS

ESM XI

EUROPEAN SPORTS MEDIA

DECEMBER 2016

HOW IT WORKS

Every month, journalists from each member of the European Sports Media group select their first XI based on the best individual performances from Europe's top competitions. For details of how each ESM member voted, visit worldsoccer.com/esm11

SEASON RANKINGS

Cumulative votes through the season

GOALKEEPERS

Thibaut COURTOIS (Chelsea)	16
Jan OBLAK (Atletico Madrid)	10
Gianluigi DONNARUMMA (Milan)	7
Gianluigi BUFFON (Juventus)	3
David DE GEA (Manchester United)	3
Manuel NEUER (Bayern Munich)	2
Diego ALVES (Valencia)	1
Willy CABALLERO (Manchester City)	1
Timo HORN (Cologne)	1
Brad JONES (Feyenoord)	1
Bernd LENO (Bayer Leverkusen)	1
Keylor NAVAS (Real Madrid)	1
Rui PATRICIO (Sporting)	1
Maarten STEKELENBURG (Everton)	1
Javi VARAS (Las Palmas)	1

DEFENDERS

Sergio RAMOS (Real Madrid)	12
Cesar AZPILICUETA (Chelsea)	9
MARCELO (Real Madrid)	9
David LUIZ (Chelsea)	8
Rapahel VARANE (Real Madrid)	8
Laurent KOSCIELNY (Arsenal)	7
Filipe LUIS (Atletico Madrid)	7
SERGI Roberto (Barcelona)	7
Diego GODIN (Atletico Madrid)	6
Gerard PIQUE (Barcelona)	6
Leonardo BONUCCI (Juventus)	5
Victor MOSES (Chelsea)	5
Nicolas OTAMENDI (Manchester City)	5
Alex SANDRO (Juventus)	5
Stefan SAVIC (Atletico Madrid)	5
Djibril SIDIBE (Monaco)	5
Hector BELLERIN (Arsenal)	4
Kamil GLIK (Monaco)	4
Raphael GUERRERO (Borussia Dortmund)	4
Philipp LAHM (Bayern Munich)	4
James MILNER (Liverpool)	4
Daniele RUGANI (Juventus)	4
Jordi ALBA (Barcelona)	3
Dani ALVES (Juventus)	3
Marcos ALONSO (Chelsea)	3
Mats HUMMELS (Bayern Munich)	3
Sokratis PAPASTATHOPOULOS (B D'mund)	3
Nicolas PAREJA (Sevilla)	3
Ricardo PEREIRA (Nice)	3
Kyle WALKER (Tottenham Hotspur)	3
David ALABA (Bayern Munich)	2
Giorgio CHIELLINI (Juventus)	2
Nathaniel CLYNE (Liverpool)	2
Sead KOLASINAC (Schalke)	2
Kostas MANOLAS (Roma)	2
Benjamin MENDY (Monaco)	2
Shkodran MUSTAFI (Arsenal)	2
PEPE (Real Madrid)	2
Samuel UMTITI (Barcelona)	2
Raul ALBIOL (Napoli)	1
Toby ALDERWEIRELD (Tottenham Hotspur)	1
Andrea BARZAGLI (Juventus)	1
Mattia CALDARA (Atalanta)	1
Gary CAHILL (Chelsea)	1
Joao CANCELO (Valencia)	1
Daniel CARVAJAL (Real Madrid)	1
DANILO (Real Madrid)	1
DANTE (Nice)	1
Stefan DE VRIJ (Lazio)	1
Federico FAZIO (Roma)	1
Jonas HECTOR (Cologne)	1
Benedikt HOWEDES (Schalke)	1
Stefan ILSANKER (RB Leipzig)	1
Branislav IVANOVIC (Chelsea)	1
JEMERSON (Monaco)	1
Phil JONES (Manchester United)	1
JUANFRAN (Atletico Madrid)	1
Dejan LOVREN (Liverpool)	1
Inigo MARTINEZ (Real Sociedad)	1
Joel MATIP (Liverpool)	1
Thomas MEUNIER (Paris Saint-Germain)	1
NACHO (Real Madrid)	1
Cesar NAVAS (Rostov)	1
Winston REID (West Ham United)	1
Marcel RISSE (Cologne)	1
Marcel SCHMELZER (Borussia Dortmund)	1
Nelson SEMEDO (Benfica)	1
Kostas STAFYLIDIS (Augsburg)	1
Jan VERTONGHEN (Tottenham Hotspur)	1
Jesus VALLEJO (Eintracht Frankfurt)	1
Virgil VAN DIJK (Southampton)	1

MIDFIELDERS

Philippe COUTINHO (Liverpool)	11
Eden HAZARD (Chelsea)	10
N'Golo KANTE (Chelsea)	10
Kevin DE BRUYNE (Manchester City)	9
Emil FORSBERG (RB Leipzig)	9
Yannick FERREIRA CARRASCO (At Madrid)	7
Joshua KIMMICH (Bayern Munich)	7
THIAGO Alcantara (Bayern Munich)	7
Luka MODRIC (Real Madrid)	6
Adam LALLANA (Liverpool)	5
SON Heung-min (Tottenham Hotspur)	5
Dele ALLI (Tottenham Hotspur)	4
Mesut OZIL (Arsenal)	4
SUSO (Milan)	4
Tiemoue BAKAYOKO (Monaco)	3
Sergio BUSQUETS (Barcelona)	3
Christian ERIKSEN (Tottenham Hotspur)	3
Naby KEITA (RB Leipzig)	3
ARDA Turan (Barcelona)	2
FERNANDINHO (Manchester City)	2
Ilkay GUNDOGAN (Manchester City)	2
Marek HAMSIK (Napoli)	2
KOKE (Atletico Madrid)	2
Toni KROOS (Real Madrid)	2
Manuel LOCATELLI (Milan)	2
Henrikh MKHITARYAN (Manchester United)	2
Miralem PJANIC (Juventus)	2
Paul POGBA (Manchester United)	2
Ivan RAKITIC (Barcelona)	2
Arjen ROBBEN (Bayern Munich)	2
Julian WEIGL (Borussia Dortmund)	2
Felipe ANDERSON (Lazio)	1
Karim EL AHMADI (Feyenoord)	1
FABINHO (Monaco)	1
Cesc FABREGAS (Chelsea)	1
GABI (Atletico Madrid)	1
Jordan HENDERSON (Liverpool)	1
Sami KHEDIRA (Juventus)	1
Mateo KOVACIC (Real Madrid)	1
Gelson MARTINS (Sporting)	1
PIZZI (Benfica)	1
RAFINHA (Barcelona)	1
Marco REUS (Borussia Dortmund)	1
Franck RIBERY (Bayern Munich)	1
Mohamed SALAH (Roma)	1
Jean SERI (Nice)	1
Tonny VILHENA (Feyenoord)	1
Georginio WIJNALDUM (Liverpool)	1

FORWARDS

Lionel MESSI (Barcelona)	14
Cristiano RONALDO (Real Madrid)	13
Diego COSTA (Chelsea)	12
Edinson CAVANI (Paris Saint-Germain)	12
Edin DZEKO (Roma)	12
Dries MERTENS (Napoli)	9
Alexis SANCHEZ (Arsenal)	9
Zlatan IBRAHIMOVIC (Manchester Utd)	8
Anthony MODESTE (Cologne)	8
Antoine GRIEZMANN (Atletico Madrid)	5
Mauro ICARDI (Internazionale)	5
Arkadiusz MILIK (Napoli)	5
Sergio AGUERO (Manchester City)	4
Pierre-Emerick AUBAMEYANG (B Dortmund)	4
Robert LEWANDOWSKI (Bayern Munich)	4
Gonzalo HIGUAIN (Juventus)	3
Mario BALOTELLI (Nice)	2
Ousmane DEMBELE (Borussia Dortmund)	3
Luis SUAREZ (Barcelona)	3
Radamel FALCAO (Monaco)	2
Theo WALCOTT (Arsenal)	2
Timo WERNER (RB Leipzig)	2
Jose CALLEJON (Napoli)	1
DOUGLAS COSTA (Bayern Munich)	1
Valere GERMAIN (Monaco)	1
Javier HERNANDEZ (Bayer Leverkusen)	1
Ciro IMMOBILE (Lazio)	1
Alvaro MORATA (Real Madrid)	1
NEYMAR (Barcelona)	1
PEDRO (Chelsea)	1
Raheem STERLING (Manchester City)	1

Jim HOLDEN

AT THE HEART OF THE GAME

China's rise is no mirage

The trumpets and bugles of European angst about the money being splashed around by Chinese football must sound particularly hollow across the sports-obsessed continents of South America and Africa.

Clubs in Brazil and Argentina, Senegal and Ivory Coast, have been powerless for decades as their finest players are lured away by the extravagant wages paid by wealthy teams in Europe. They have long known one of the game's bitter truths: professional footballers are forever mercenaries who follow the money wherever it takes them.

When Belgium international midfielder Axel Witsel opted to join Tianjin Quanjian rather than Italian champions Juventus, he gave an honest answer for his decision, saying: "On the one hand there was a top club like Juve, but on the other there was a crucial offer for my family that I couldn't turn down."

Witsel will reportedly be paid £15million per annum for five years. With bonuses, it might well be a £100m deal overall.

The 28-year-old has been viciously condemned on social media in Belgium and elsewhere, yet isn't that the worst kind of hypocrisy? After all, how many of those critics would turn down such riches?

Some observers argue that moving to China represents a cop out in a player's career, a signal of failure at the highest level. Yet the former Tottenham Hotspur midfielder Paulinho moved to Guangzhou Evergrande and has since won back his place in Brazil's national team.

> Importing high-quality players and coaches is a crucial part of the long-term plan to make Chinese football a superpower of the globe

Players like Witsel will not necessarily suffer in the international arena by moving to China – and the more stars who make the journey the less likely that will be.

Perhaps there is even a counter-intuitive argument that being free from the rigours of a full European club season will make them more effective performers at a World Cup.

In reality, the only surprising aspect of China's emergence as ambitious financial competitors in the world's most popular sport is that it has taken so long. A similar process has been occurring for many years among Olympic disciplines, with the Chinese rising steadily towards the top of the medal tables at each successive Games.

Importing high-quality players and coaches is a crucial part of the long-term plan to make Chinese football a superpower of the globe in the way that their economy already is. Luiz Felipe Scolari, Felix Magath, Andre Villas-Boas, Manuel Pellegrini and Fabio Cannavaro are all currently in charge of club sides, while players tempted in the past couple of months include Carlos Tevez, Oscar and Jackson Martinez.

It is predicted a Chinese club will smash the world transfer record in the next year, even though there are moves to curb some of the extravagant spending. The only real question is how long it will take for the Chinese Super League to become a global player.

Money is also being invested in the grass-roots game, and given the Olympic example it must be likely that high-quality Chinese players will develop within a generation.

The influence of Chinese money on the game is not just in Beijing and Shanghai; it is investing in great swathes of traditional European football, with new Chinese owners taking over at Aston Villa and Wolverhampton Wanderers in England, for example.

China's richest man, Wang Jialin, has bought a 20 per cent stake in Atletico Madrid, has an interest in IPL cricket and is reported to have covetous eyes for Disney.

European clubs have been making strenuous efforts to win fans and build a commercial platform in China, but they are also beginning to understand that it won't prevent the first serious challenge to their financial supremacy of the football world. WS

Influence... Shanghai SIPG's Andre Villas-Boas is just one of several big-name coaches in the Chinese Super League

"I'm a pioneer, like the other players who came here before me"

Oscar reflects on his £60million transfer from Chelsea to Shanghai SIPG

Happy times...Graham Taylor at Watford

OBITUARIES

Graham TAYLOR (1944-2017)

If Graham Taylor held any rancour towards the journalists who ripped him apart for his management of England then he never let it show in later years.

Taylor's death at 72 prompted a flood of warm tributes to a man who achieved remarkable work at Watford twice over, as well as spells at Aston Villa and Wolverhampton Wanderers.

Yet Taylor was also a controversial figure even before he led England to a group-stage exit at Euro 1992 in Sweden and to World Cup qualifying failure a year later.

And his England failures were exacerbated by an ill-advised television documentary, *An Impossible Job*.

The son of a sports journalist who covered Scunthorpe United for the local paper, Taylor's playing ambitions were curtailed by a knee injury.

His initial managerial work at Lincoln City attracted interest from Watford owner Elton John, and the administrative foundations laid by Eddie Plumley and Bertie Mee at Vicarage Road left Taylor free to concentrate on the football.

Remarkably, he took Watford up from the fourth division to first in successive seasons, finishing second to Liverpool in the league in 1983 and losing 2-0 to Everton in the 1984 FA Cup Final. Players such as striker Luther Blissett and winger John Barnes flourished under Taylor.

But, for all his love of good football, Taylor was a pragmatist, an adherent to the long-ball theories of Charles Reep and the FA's long-time director of coaching, Charles Hughes.

The pair had developed the theory of POMO, the Position of Maximum Opportunity, which held that most goals were scored from fewer than three passes.

While some believed the long-ball game meant English football was not merely standing still but going backwards, Taylor kept on smiling, because it worked.

In 1987 he was lured from Watford by Doug Ellis to revive just-relegated Aston Villa and they won promotion at the first attempt. Two years later, in 1990, Villa finished league runners-up to Liverpool.

Taylor was the obvious choice then, considering the influence of Hughes within the FA, to succeed Bobby Robson as England manager.

England, undefeated, won their Euro 1992 qualifying group but lost their way badly in the finals. They endured goalless draws with thrown-together Denmark and France, and thus had to beat hosts Sweden to reach the semi-finals.

David Platt put England ahead in Stockholm after four minutes, but an equaliser from Jan Eriksson shortly after half-time provoked a spirit-shattering freeze from the visitors.

England had to win and, controversially, Taylor decided to replace captain Gary Lineker – who was one goal short of Bobby Charlton's England goalscoring record – with Alan Smith. Tomas Brolin caught England on the counter-attack and that was that.

The following morning *The Sun* lampooned Taylor by superimposing his face on the image of a vegetable and proclaiming: "Swedes 2, Turnips 1."

It was downhill all the way after that, with the subsequently decisive World Cup qualifying failure against Holland generating the infamous images of Taylor's frustration in telling a linesman: "The referee has got me the sack. Thank him ever so much for that, won't you?"

Taylor recovered his confidence and good humour at Wolves and then Watford, who he coaxed to successive promotions and back to the Premier League. A spell as Watford chairman saw the Rous Stand renamed after him in 2014.

Taylor's man-management style drew illustrative tributes from Paul McGrath, among others. As a manager he liked to impose club discipline and loyalty, but he also appreciated a need to help his players meet the pressures.

After one Wolves game he told me: "I should have brought a Tommy Cooper video for the players at half-time to get them to unwind. Players take a lot of criticism. They need to be able to have a laugh, to loosen up."

Taylor the manager took more than his own share of criticism; it was all to the credit of Taylor the man that he was ultimately able to loosen up himself.

Keir Radnedge

World Cup double... Roberto Cabanas

Roberto CABANAS (1961-2017)

A league winner in Colombia with Club America in 1985, and Argentina with Boca Juniors in 1986, he was part of Paraguay's Copa America-winning squad in 1979 and played at the 1986 World Cup, scoring twice in a 2-2 draw with Belgium. Cabanas spent four seasons at New York Cosmos and won NASL's Most Valuable Player award in 1983.

Francois VAN DER ELST (1954-2017)

A Belgium international, like his younger brother Leo, he was capped 44 times and played in the 1980 Euro Final. He won the European Cup-winners Cup twice with Anderlecht, scoring twice in the 1976 Final against West Ham United, who he would later play for.

"You cannot force someone to be where they do not want to be"

Sevilla president Jose Castro Carmona comments on speculation that sporting director Monchi could leave the club in the summer

PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

Appointments, sackings and loans

IN

Back...Sam Allardyce

EUROPE

Having stepped down as England manager after 67 days, **SAM ALLARDYCE** was appointed Crystal Palace boss three months later, replacing **ALAN PARDEW**. **PAUL CLEMENT** left his role as assistant coach at Bayern Munich to take over at Swansea City, while **MARCO SILVA,** who won the Greek league with Olympiakos last term, joined Hull City.

DIETER HECKING, out of work since leaving Wolfsburg in October, replaced **ANDRE SCHUBERT** at Borussia Monchengladbach.

Osasuna sporting director **PETAR VASILJEVIC** replaced **JOAQUIN CAPARROS** as the Liga side's coach until the end of the season.

CONCACAF

Former Real Madrid coach **BENITO FLORO**, who was in charge of Canada's national team until September, took over at Costa Rican club Alajuelense.

Gladbach... Dieter Hecking

AFRICA

Tunisian side CS Sfaxien appointed Argentinian coach **NESTOR CLAUSEN** as they go in search of a record-extending fourth CAF Confederation Cup.

GODWIN OBAJE, who was top scorer in last season's Nigerian Premier League, joined Tunisia's Etoile du Sahel from Wikki Tourists.

ASIA

Chinese Super League side Shanghai SIPG paid a reported Asian record fee of €70.5million to sign Brazilian midfielder **OSCAR** from Chelsea.

CARLOS TEVEZ also moved to China. Joining Shanghai Shenhua from Boca Juniors, he was said to have become the world's best-paid player, earning a rumoured £615,000 a week.

Former UAE coach **ABDULLAH MESFER** took charge of Jordan's national team.

JO SUNG-HWAN returned to take charge of South Korean side Jeju United after **KIM IN-SOO** left to join Ulsan Hyundai.

MICHAEL VALKANIS was named interim coach of Melbourne City after **JOHN VAN'T SCHIP** quit. **DES BUCKINGHAM** and **CHRIS GREENACRE** were appointed co-coaches of Wellington Phoenix until the end of the A-League season following the resignation of **ERNIE MERRICK**.

OUT

Ten games...Cesare Prandelli

EUROPE

CESARE PRANDELLI resigned after just 10 games in charge of Valencia with the club only outside La Liga's relegation zone on goal difference. **JUANDE RAMOS** left Malaga by mutual consent after seven months in charge. At Sporting Gijon, **ABELARDO** left his role as coach but refused to accept the reported €4m that he was owed in compensation.

SHOTA ARVELADZE left Maccabi Tel Aviv after a run of poor results.

Belgium defender **ANTHONY VAN DEN BORRE** announced his retirement at the age of 29.

SOUTH AMERICA

RICARDO ZIELINSKI quit as coach of Racing Club following three successive defeats, while **LUCAS BERNARDI** left fellow Argentinian side Arsenal after five games.

Former Chelsea defender **ALEX**, who won 17 caps for Brazil but has been without a club since leaving Milan in the summer, announced his retirement at the age of 34 due to injury.

CONCACAF

Trinidad & Tobago coach **TOM SAINTFIET** quit after they failed to qualify for the Gold Cup.

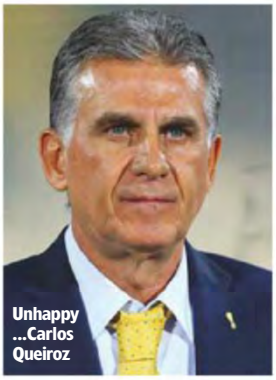
AFRICA

South Africa sacked national coach **SHAKES MASHABA**.

Debut goal... Julian Draxler

Draxler among the transfer window's big-money movers

JULIAN DRAXLER joined Paris Saint-Germain from Wolfsburg for €40million. For all the January transfer-window moves in Europe's top five leagues, go to **www.worldsoccer.com**



Unhappy ...Carlos Queiroz

Queiroz quits again

Ex Real Madrid and Portugal boss **CARLOS QUEIROZ** resigned as coach of Iran, citing a lack of support from the country's football association.

The 63-year-old has quit several times since taking the job in 2011 only to later return.

"The promises have been blown up, it is all delay and postponements," he explained.

Brian GLANVILLE

THE VOICE OF FOOTBALL

Graham Taylor: a 'national treasure' with failed ideas

That the late, much lamented Graham Taylor should be seen at Watford as an almost Messianic figure is scarcely surprising. No manager has or ever could do what he triumphantly did for them, taking them all the astonishing way from the fourth tier to second place in the top division and getting them to the FA Cup Final at Wembley, where they were runners-up.

It was mildly surprising, however, to find he had become what now tends to be known as a "national treasure", with the football powers that be decreeing a celebratory minute of happy clapping at every ground. Personally, I would much prefer the old established practice of a solemn minute's silence, but I suppose we must resign ourselves to the fact that such a silence would all too often be irreverently broken.

My own relations with Taylor were somewhat dramatic.

Early some football seasons ago, still managing Watford, he came into the press room at Queens Park Rangers and refused to shake my hand, muttering "I can't, I can't!" and then went into a tirade of "you're a liar, you write lies, you're a liar, you write lies!"

A long argument ensued as I struggled to understand what he meant. Jim Smith, the QPR manager, looked on with surprise. "I couldn't understand," he would tell me later. "It wasn't anything to do with you."

Well, yes and no. As the smoke slowly cleared, I was able to discern that Taylor was talking of something I had written in *World Soccer*, to the effect that in a youth match in Tel Aviv, where he had been managing England, sitting next to my informant and colleague Rob Hughes, he had substituted a full-back who had previously criticised his long-ball methods.

On returning home from Loftus Road, I discovered the piece had appeared three years earlier. It was in essence what Freudians call "a displacement".

Fourth Division... Graham Taylor and his Watford squad in August 1977

What Taylor was really complaining about was my criticism of the long-ball methods which were propelling Watford to success and which, cutting out midfield as they did, encouraged other teams to play that way. Indeed, the game seemed under assault from two directions: Watford's and that of the FA.

> What Taylor was really complaining about was my criticism of the long-ball methods which were propelling Watford to success

The then-director of coaching Charles Hughes was also dedicated to eliminating the midfield, seeking what was called the "Position of Maximum Opportunity".

The virus, I feared, was spreading. Hughes had been given control of the England under-21 team and there were even fears that Bobby Robson himself, then the England manager, could be persuaded to follow Hughes.

Taylor's ideas were not original. They had been conceived and published back in the old News Chronicle in the 1950s by a wing commander Charles Reep of the RAF. No computers then, his squiggly little diagrams showed how he thought the game should be played, under his system of match analysis.

Only Stanley Cullis, then the successful manager of Wolves and no man for what he called "tip tap" in midfield, tried to follow Reep's postulates. Two shattering European Cup defeats by Barcelona were something of a corrective.

But direct football, if one may so call it, had actually long been rooted in English football. In 1932 at Chelsea, days before

England met the Austrian "Wonderteam", its English coach Jimmy Hogan brought his players to watch Chelsea play Everton. Each was led by a famous centre-forward – Chelsea by Hughie Gallacher, Everton by Dixie Dean – and, to the bewilderment of Hogan's men, each team constantly belted the ball down the middle to one or other centre-forward.

Taylor would eventually drop Reep, who wrote to Watford asking for a pay-off, only to be told that he had been employed not by them but by Taylor. In due course, Watford's methods were penetrated by their opponents and Taylor's team gradually dropped out of contention.

Talent...Watford's John Barnes

Jeff Powell, of the *Daily Mail*, was the other football correspondent who disdained Taylor's methods. At Watford, he would find himself confronted not only by Taylor but once by Taylor's father, who had found his way into the press room.

Taylor moved on with competence to Aston Villa, after one of whose games at Millwall, he and I found ourselves in the press box. "Shall we start again?" he asked and this time we did shake hands.

Shock...Gary Lineker is substituted against Sweden

Unhappy national service

What the various eulogies of Taylor largely missed out was his unhappy years as manager of England. He had put long-ball theory largely behind him, but both his tactics and his selections were deeply erratic.

At his third match in charge, against the Republic of Ireland in Dublin, a long-ball team indeed under Jack Charlton, he left out the potentially brilliant Paul Gascoigne on the grounds that the ball would largely be in the air and too high for him to reach, only to replace him with Aston Villa's Gordon Cowans, a smaller man than Gascoigne.

Somehow or other England squeezed through their qualifying group to reach the European finals in Sweden, there to be eliminated in their initial group, beaten by Sweden in Stockholm. Ironically, two excellent chances in the first half were missed by England's outside-right Tony Daley, a protege of Taylor at Villa Park. Bewilderingly, with England in the second half a goal behind, Taylor decided to take off Gary Lineker, then within touching distance of England's goalscoring record, replacing him with Alan Smith, deputed to hold the ball up. England lost.

So to the World Cup, with a miscellany of team and tactics, Taylor's methods failed embarrassingly in the vital game against Norway, in Oslo. The Norwegians had been using their big winger Jostein Flo, really a striker, as a threat. So Taylor put Gary Pallister, a hefty centre-back, at left-back, to counter Flo, where he failed utterly. England lost.

Luck and refereeing decisions were not with England when it came to the decisive match in Holland, which they lost but might have won. Taylor, who consented to be filmed in a documentary, was heard to exclaim to the linesman: "Tell your friend [the referee] he's just got me the sack!"

But his achievements at Watford, however controversially achieved, remain exceptional.

Shame on Howe and Bournemouth

Upset...Bournemouth lose at Millwall

The glorious FA Cup, progenitor of all the major competitions which, since 1872, have followed from it, continues to be shamelessly abused. Even by as bright a manager as Bournemouth's Eddie Howe, who put out a wholly reserve team at Millwall, which was humiliated 3-0.

Small wonder a Bournemouth fan who travelled no small distance to the ground remarked bitterly that "this was a shameful day for Bournemouth and for the FA Cup".

As my cogent and pungent colleague Rod Liddle points out, there was no palpable pressure on Bournemouth. They are comfortably tucked into a decent league position, they have no European fixtures to encumber them.

Fielding weak teams in the league was once punishable with a fine. But, as Liddle points out, leading clubs could laugh at such trivialities. He suggests points should be deducted, but of course they never will be and, anyway, these are two separate tournaments under two different bodies.

When will China's bubble burst?

Short term... Drogba (left) and Anelka

The word "shanghaied" used to denote that a hapless victim had been kidnapped and taken aboard a vessel. Now, perhaps, we should resurrect it to signify one or the other Shanghai clubs snatching a player from Europe or South America to earn enormous sums in China.

Nicolas Anelka and Didier Drogba didn't stay there long a few years ago, and you wonder when the bubble will burst.

It makes some sense for a veteran such as Carlos Tevez to take the money, even though it means playing in a vacuum.

● Read Brian Glanville's weekly online column at worldsoccer.com

eye witness

Simon Hill reports

AUSTRALIA

Still no up and down

A-League resists relegation as a bridge too far

With no promotion or relegation, the Australian top flight is, in effect, a closed shop. And, on the face of it – when faced with huge competition from a sporting landscape that is dominated by three other football codes, not to mention the national obsession of cricket – such reasoning looks sound.

Faced with vast geographical distances between only a handful of major cities (just five have a population of over one million), the A-League's existence as a single structure makes sense. For example, if a regional team from the second tier – the state competitions, known as the National Premier Leagues – were to be promoted at the expense of a club from say, Sydney, the commercial ramifications would be severe.

However, Football Federation Australia (FFA) is under pressure to shake things up.

Fans are becoming increasingly impatient for a more traditional set-up, while the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) has repeatedly said that promotion/relegation is its preferred model.

But, in the short term, any such change

Saved...Wellington Phoenix

appears to be a bridge too far, especially with the existing A-League clubs still struggling to make money. Last year the FFA released its "Whole of Football" plan, which outlined the roadmap for the game over the next 20 years and effectively ruled out such a system. Instead, it vaguely commits to clubs being involved in a "managed process of 'in and out' as circumstances arise".

The first "in and out" came close to becoming reality in October 2015, when FFA initially refused Wellington Phoenix a decade-long extension on their licence, amid rumours that a consortium was preparing to fund a third Sydney team.

In the end, a public backlash against the Phoenix's potential expulsion led to them being awarded the 10-year deal, to be delivered in instalments, and dependent upon the New Zealand club – which is another bone of contention as the AFC isn't keen on an Oceania team playing in an Asian competition – satisfying certain commercial "metrics".

So, the current edition of the 12-year-old competition is made up of the same 10 franchises that have competed for the last four years. But the signing of a new TV

Deal...David Gallop (far right) announces the A-League's $346million TV contract with Fox Sports

Outsiders...second-tier sides Melbourne Knights (in red) and Cockburn City meet in the FFA Cup

deal, with Fox Sports, may finally usher in some change – though the deal, worth $346million (£212m) over six years, hasn't found universal favour.

The pay-TV network has broadcast the league since its inception, but it was expected to face tough competition for the latest rights negotiations, particularly from telecommunications company, Optus, which has taken the popular English Premier League away from Fox. In the end, Fox were the only bidders, despite ▸

Gone...Robbie Fowler played for North Queensland Fury before they lost their A-League licence

AUSTRALIA'S MOVERS AND SHAKERS

STEVEN LOWY
Chairman of FFA in succession to his dad, Frank, whose reforms transformed the game in Australia. He has had to restructure the FFA constitution to mollify FIFA, which was unhappy that many sections of the game were under-represented.

ANGE POSTECOGLOU
National coach who led Australia to the Asian Cup in 2015, and his Socceroos remain on course for the 2018 World Cup in Russia. Has widespread influence in the game, being regularly consulted with regards to coaching appointments – even in Aussie Rules, where he sat on the panel to choose a new coach for Carlton. Recently released a book, called *Changing the Game*, in which he outlined his vision for the sport's future in Australia.

TIM CAHILL
Melbourne City "marquee" player, he was brought home with the help of FFA, who chipped in for his wages in part-payment for his assistance in promoting the A-League. The national team's record scorer, with 48 goals in 94 games, he could appear at his fourth World Cup finals in 2018.

SIMON PEARCE
Melbourne City vice-chairman and, as the City Football Group representative in Australia, a leading voice in the clubs' regular battles with FFA. Divides his time between Australia, the UAE and England, where he sits on the board of Manchester City.

PATRICK DELANY
CEO of Fox Sports, the TV network which, along with the owners, effectively bankrolls the A-League.

MOYA DODD
Former coach of the national women's team and a member of the FIFA and AFC Executive Committees, with special responsibility for developing women's football. A lawyer, she also sits on the FFA Board.

assurances from FFA CEO David Gallop that there was competition in the market. The $346m also fell some way short of Gallop's desired figure of $80m (£49m) a year.

The clubs, meantime, are headed for a battle with FFA over how the money is divvied up, with their demands of $6m (£3.6m) per annum unlikely to be met, meaning that the prospect of a parting of the ways between governing body and league is a distinct possibility.

Still, the security provided offers hope for expansion, perhaps as early as the second year of the new deal, and already several contenders are jostling for position.

The current favourite is Tasmania, a region chronically under-represented on the national sporting stage. Its bid has

Expansion...York Park in Tasmania has hosted A-League games

A-LEAGUE 2016-17

ADELAIDE UNITED
Current champions, but struggling this season. They play at the compact, atmospheric Hindmarsh Stadium and are coached by former Spain and Barcelona midfielder Gui Amor. They are backed by local lawyer Greg Griffin and businessman Rob Gerard, whose family established the Clipsal electrical brand.

BRISBANE ROAR
Three-time champions who traditionally play the best football in the country. Home is the cavernous Suncorp Stadium and they are coached by former Coventry City and Australia striker John Aloisi. The owner, Nirwan Bakrie of the mysterious Bakrie Group of Indonesia, is rarely seen at home matches.

CENTRAL COAST MARINERS
The league's smallest club have regularly punched above their weight, winning the title in 2013, although they did finish bottom last season. They play at the picturesque Central Coast Stadium and are coached by former international Paul Okon, who played for Club Brugge, Lazio and Leeds United.

MELBOURNE CITY
Recently won their first trophy, the FFA Cup, and have been transformed from the underachieving Melbourne Heart, following the takeover by the City Football Group. They share AAMI Park with Melbourne Victory but are currently without a coach following the resignation of John Van't Schip.

MELBOURNE VICTORY
Australia's biggest club and one of its most successful with a record three A-League titles. With over 25,000 members, they take their bigger games away from AAMI Park to Etihad Stadium. Coached by Kevin Muscat, they are owned by a consortium, the chairman of which is Anthony Di Pietro.

Derby...Tim Cahill (far left, in white) heads Melbourne City in front against Melbourne Victory

Glorious past...South Melbourne have aspirations of returning to Australian football's top table

solid financial backing and the state government has thrown its weight behind it, but Tasmania may struggle for FFA support, given the population of the island is little over 500,000.

Another possible candidate is South Melbourne, a famous name from the past who were voted Oceania club of the century, are four-time champions of the semi-pro National Soccer League – the A-League's forerunner – and who played Manchester United in the 2000 Club World Cup. However, Melbourne already has two A-League clubs and FFA may stall at the prospect of admitting a club that is openly proud of its Greek heritage. Those "ethnic" connections are often put forward as the reason why the old competition failed.

> "The Asian Football Confederation has repeatedly stated that promotion/relegation is its preferred model"

Of the rest, a second Brisbane club appears to have momentum, although there would be stiff competition from Wollongong, South Sydney, Geelong, another Adelaide or Perth team, and perhaps even Auckland.

Gallop' says the game must "fish where the fish are" (meaning cities with big populations) and with two previous expansion clubs having folded – Gold Coast United and North Queensland Fury – FFA must get expansion right this time.

Fail, and the ultimate goal of promotion/relegation may be a lifetime away. WS

NEWCASTLE JETS
Champions in 2008, they haven't made the finals in six seasons and have had ownership issues – although these have been resolved with the arrival of Chinese businessman Martin Lee of the Ledman Group. Coached by Mark Jones, they share McDonald Jones Stadium with the local Rugby League club.

PERTH GLORY
A heavyweight in the old NSL under Nick Tana, whose vision laid the ground for the A-League concept. Now owned by mining magnate Tony Sage, the club is yet to win a trophy in the modern era. Coached by ex-Birmingham City midfielder Kenny Lowe, they play their home games at the purpose-built nib Stadium.

SYDNEY
The A-League's glamour club have won two titles and were responsible for bringing Alessandro Del Piero and Dwight Yorke to Australia. Owned by Russian banker David Traktovenko, and coached by ex-Socceroo Graham Arnold, they play at Allianz Stadium, next door to the Sydney Cricket Ground.

WELLINGTON PHOENIX
The only New Zealand club in the league, they are yet to win a trophy but have reached the finals four times. Owned by the Welnix Group, they play at Westpac Stadium, which is also home to the Hurricanes rugby union side, and have co-coaches in Des Buckingham and Chris Greenacre.

WESTERN SYDNEY WANDERERS
Created by FFA, with financial assistance from the government, they won the 2014 Asian Champions League and are now owned by Paul Lederer, CEO of Primo Group. Coached by Tony Popovic, they play at Spotless Stadium in Homebush as their Parramatta home is being rebuilt.

Steve Menary reports

CYPRUS

Firebombs, fines and fixes

Corruption is widespread in the Cypriot game despite progress in the Champions League

Omonia president Antonis Tzionis sits quietly in his chair in the offices of the Cypriot club. Although not naturally a quiet man, he knows that a word out of place could cost him another €5,000.

In December he made the claim that Cypriot football was "dishonest" and dogged by "filth, stench, nepotism, cronyism and corruption".

The game, said Tzionis, was controlled by betting activity and corruption, and there is no freedom of speech. In response, he was fined €5,000 by the Cyprus Football Association (CFA) for bringing the game into disrepute.

For a game that, in recent years, has – on the pitch, at least – punched above its weight for an island of just 1.1 million people, those are startling claims.

Since Anorthosis Famagusta became the first Cypriot side to qualify for the group stage of the Champions League, in 2008-09, AEK, AEL and Apollon have all reached the Europa League group phase.

The island's biggest club, APOEL, have qualified for the Europa League or Champions League group stage five times in the last eight seasons, and in 2011-12 they went on a stunning run to the Champions League quarter-finals, beating Zenit, Porto and Lyon before losing to Real Madrid.

Former Barcelona junior Urko Pardo joined APOEL at the start of that season and has been there ever since. "Cyprus is a land of opportunity for players like me who did not get in the first team at home," says the 33-year-old goalkeeper. "Twenty years ago, they would have had to drop into the third division, now they can come here and succeed."

Outspoken... Omonia president Antonis Tzionis

Former England under-21 international Matt Derbyshire joined Omonia from Rotherham United at the start of this season. An immediate hit, he is the Cypriot game's biggest star and was the First Division's top scorer at the halfway stage.

Like the Portuguese and Spaniards who make up most of the overseas influx, Derbyshire's move was very straightforward as Cyprus joined the European Union in 2004, thus ensuring freedom of movement.

Clubs are expected to include at least two Cypriot players in their starting XI and are fined €1,500 for each missing player, so fielding 11 foreigners costs clubs €3,000 a game. But this makes no impact on chairmen like Andreas Karapatakis of AEK Larnaca.

"We get fined most weeks," says Karapatakis, who ignores the rule due to the cost of wages for Cypriot players.

Immediate hit...Omonia's English striker Matt Derbyshire (left)

Nicosia derby... APOEL's Georgios Efrem (right) and Renato Margaca of Omonia

Meanwhile, the number of overseas players continues to grow.

CIES research in 2016 showed 65.4 per cent of players in Cyprus were foreign. The Pancyprian footballers' union (PASP) puts the figure higher, at 86 per cent, and says every year two thirds of the players in Cyprus leave the island.

PASP president Spyros Neofitides is an outspoken figure in Cypriot football and

has consistently tried to tackle the corruption. Like Omonia president Tzionis, Neofitides has also been fined €5,000 by the CFA for speaking out.

"This season has been unique," says Neofitides, who is a former goalkeeper. "We've seen some strange results from the start of the season."

Strange results are not uncommon, but fans are growing weary. Omonia claim its attendances have halved. APOEL have 8,500 season-ticket holders but supporters increasingly favour more credible European games.

> "This season has been unique. We've seen some strange results from the start of the season"
>
> **Players union president, Spyros Neofitides**

Christos Zavallis from the APOEL Supporters Trust says: "It's to the benefit of the whole league for this to stop. If you want to attract players, it makes it more difficult."

With money from TV, crowds and UEFA, First Division clubs are able to run full-time squads.

APOEL are the biggest payers, while AEK and Omonia pay their players between €80,000 and €150,000 a year – although actually getting paid has been

a consistent problem. And that has enabled criminals to exploit an environment where match fixing has always existed.

"The soil here is fertile," admits Professor Nicos Kartakoullis, a respected academic from the University of Nicosia and the youngest chairman of the Cyprus Sports Organisation until quitting in 2011 in sheer frustration.

During the Greek Civil War, from 1946-49, APOEL asked players to sign affiliation to the right-wing Greek government. Some players quit and left to form their own club and those political divides remain.

APOEL remain the team of the right., bitter rivals Omonia are the team of the left, while the likes of Nea Salamis Famagusta also attract left-leaning support. Matches used to be fixed for political gain; now it's money – and the problem is spiralling out of control.

Recent PASP research shows that 40.5 per cent of players in Cypriot professional football are aware of match fixing, and 17.2 per cent have been approached. In 20 per cent of the cases, players are approached either during a game or a team meeting.

With no minimum wage, some players can be on as little as €50 a month, particularly if their club drops into the second division.

Earlier PASP research showed that 65 per cent of players fixing games are doing so because of delayed payments. In response, the CFA began checking payments. The problem remains bigger outside in the lower leagues but still affects the First Division.

Fined...AEK chairman Andreas Karapatakis

In 2015, the CFA introduced new measures to stop the fixing, starting with a €5,000 fine for the first incident and rising to €10,000 for a second, with relegation for third-time offenders. The measures, however, did not work.

What are known as "red envelopes" from UEFA, notifying the CFA about games attracting suspiciously high levels of betting activity, poured into Nicosia in the first half of this season.

Clash...Omonia (in green) and AEK

A 4-0 win by Apollon Limassol over AEZ Zakakiou on September 11 was the first to be flagged up by UEFA. A 3-0 win by APOEL over Aris Limassol on September 25 was next and the red

Opportunity...APOEL goalkeeper Urko Pardo

Left wing... Omonia fans

envelopes kept on coming.

In November, UEFA's head of integrity, Emilio Garcia, arrived unexpectedly on the island intent on action.

UEFA's position on match fixing has been strengthened since Albanian champions Skenderbeu were thrown out of this season's Champions League after suspiciously high levels of betting activity.

UEFA vice-president Marios Lefkaritis warned the CFA that the European body would take action against Cypriot clubs next. But the fact that Lefkaritis, who preceded Costakis Koutsokoumnis as CFA president, should take a stand against corruption was bitterly ironic.

Lefkaritis was a member of the FIFA Executive Committee in the infamous vote that decided the 2018 and 2022 World Cup hosts. In 2015, German company ARD TV screened allegations that Petrolina holdings, a company owned by Lefkaritis, did a deal with Russian oil and gas company Gazprom just two days before the vote.

Lefkaritis also sold land to Qatari companies for $32m but, after being confronted, he denied the Gazprom deal until being shown proof of his involvement, after which he claimed Gazprom were "not partners but his customers".

With Lefkaritis threatening Cypriot sides with exclusion from UEFA competition, the

Union boss... Spyros Neofitides

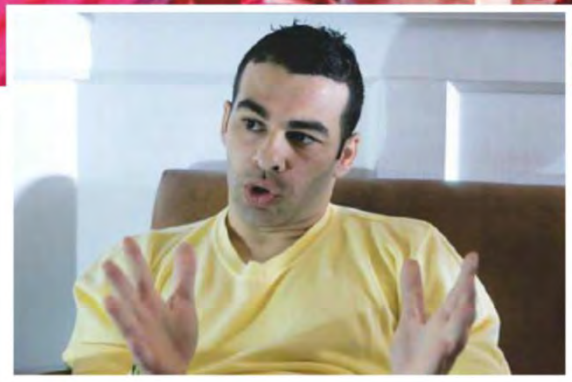
CFA introduced new measures in December 2016.

Now a first "red envelope" incurs a six-point deduction and a €50,000 fine. A second warning brings immediate expulsion for the club for the rest of the season. Three-time offenders will be banned from all CFA competitions for five years and fined €1m.

Since the new rules, there has been no red envelopes and the fixing has stopped – for now. And while the threat of serious financial consequences may have worked, many clubs remain in a fragile position.

In 2013, Omonia were saved from collapse only after fans raised €3.5m. The same year, Anorthosis, who earned €6.5m from the Champions League alone in 2008-09, nearly went under after accumulating debts of €13.5m. They are still up for sale.

AEK recently opened a new €8m stadium which was the first built by a Cypriot club with private funds, but most clubs play in rented grounds, with APOEL and Omonia, for example, sharing the GSP Stadium in Nicosia.



Critic...former ref Mario Panayi

"APOEL have not invested the UEFA money and have nothing to show for it," says Zavallis.

Bigger clubs such as APOEL and Omonia are not generally thought to be implicated in match fixing, other than by playing against teams who have been corrupted.

The problem, most people in Cypriot football agree, has been exacerbated by the CFA's decision midway through the 2014-15 season to expand the First Division from 12 to 14 teams.

At the end of that season, one team was relegated and another disqualified, and four teams were promoted from the second tier. In August 2015, Koutsokoumnis was re-elected CFA president for a seventh consecutive term until 2019.

The league now splits at Christmas, with the bottom two immediately relegated. The top six chase European places, and the next six sides play off to avoid one more relegation spot.

Critics argue that there are too many matches of no importance involving smaller clubs, who in some cases have virtually no support. These clubs are typically the ones under suspicion. In Federbet's annual "Fixed Matches" report for 2016, three of four Cypriot games cited as "suspicious" involved Aris Limassol.

And while the red envelopes may have stopped for now, the culprits are at large and problems still remain.

After AEZ Zakakiou drew 3-3 at

Delight...APOEL's Georgios Efrem celebrates after scoring against Omonia

Bomb attack..the offices of FA president Costakis Koutsokoumnis' insurance company in Limassol

Karmiotissa on December 16 with an injury-time goal, the car of visiting assistant coach Alexis Garpozis was bombed outside his house. A fire was also set off at the canteen of a five-a-side operation belonging to AEZ coach Demetris Demetriou.

"It's crazy, something has to change," says Professor Kartakoullis. "People are laughing at us. It's humiliating, as people in Cyprus are crazy for football.

"At the end of the day you feel stupid. Why would you spend €20 going to a game when you know it could be fixed? Football in Cyprus is at an alarming stage."

Now, at long last, the Cypriot government is getting involved.

"I am getting tired," says weary union boss Neofitides. "The change in the law is our last chance. If this does not happen, then anyone can fix a match in Cyprus."

The government has drafted legislation on sports integrity to allow Cypriot police to monitor private communications, including phones and emails, but how that will work with encrypted communication such as WhatsApp remains unclear.

"People can also just buy a SIM card in a mini market," says Mario Panayi, a former Cypriot referee and another outspoken critic of the corruption on the island.

In 2015, Panayi convened a press conference and made widely published allegations about corruption at all levels of Cypriot football.

According to sources in Cyprus, there was a 48-hour gap between Panayi making his allegations to police and a raid on the CFA's offices. No information was subsequently found, leaving Panayi looking stupid and raising suspicions that hard drives had been cleaned up in the intervening period.

Getting the CFA to respond to this or other allegations is difficult as emails and letters to the media department and even direct to Koutsokoumnis go unanswered.

And Koutsokoumnis has good reason for keeping his head down as he stands for election to FIFA's Executive Council in April.

Threat...UEFA and FIFA ExCo member Marios Lefkaritis

Well regarded in football's upper echelons, he mediated for FIFA in disputes between Israel and Palestine in 2014, and more recently between the Greek association and the government. But at home is increasingly under fire – literally, in the case of the Limassol offices of his company, Minerva Insurance, which were bombed just before Christmas.

Meanwhile, Panayi had another explosive surprise in store for Koutsokoumnis. The documentation that he sent to police in 2015, allegedly showing evidence of CFA corruption, was discounted because of how he obtained it, but he has more. In January 2017, Panayi sent further documentation to the Cypriot police, and if this is ignored he will contact Interpol before the FIFA vote in April.

> "At the end of the day you feel stupid. Why would you spend €20 going to a game when you know it could be fixed?"
>
> **Nicos Kartakoullis, former Cyprus Sports Organisation chairman**

And that is not the only surprise the embattled Koutsokoumnis faces.

Back in Omonia's offices, Antonis Tzionis finally speaks. He has a solution to the corruption and wants the top clubs to split from the CFA. Although such a seismic move would be difficult as the CFA controls the TV money, Tzionis feels that for the biggest 10 clubs to run their own league is the only answer. WS

Investment...AEK's new home stadium in Larnaca

Jeep
Jeep

Keep on *rising*

WORDS: Paddy Agnew

The Juventus and Italy keeper is one of a rare breed: a player who started at the very top and then continued to rise

On the morning of November 19, 1995, Parma coach Nevio Scala knocked on the hotel-room door of 17-year-old keeper Gianluigi "Gigi" Buffon. It was the morning of Parma's home game with the mighty Milan; a team that had wiped out Johan Cruyff's Barcelona 4-0 a year earlier in the Champions League Final.

Scala's first-choice keeper, Luca Bucci, was out injured for some weeks and the coach had been less than impressed by the performance of back-up Alessandro Nista. He therefore pondered the idea of giving young Buffon his professional debut against one of the best club sides in the world at the time.

"I am thinking of playing you this afternoon against Milan. Is that any problem?" asked Scala.

"No problem," came the immediate reply. And the rest is indeed history.

Like everybody else at Parma, Scala knew all about the youngster. Buffon had joined Parma four years earlier as a 13-year-old and had immediately ➤

Timeline

NOV 19, 1995
Makes his Serie A debut and keeps a clean sheet for Parma in a 0-0 home draw with Milan.

OCT 29, 1997
Wins his first senior international cap in a World Cup qualifying play-off against Russia in Moscow.

MAY 12, 1999
Four weeks after winning his first trophy in the Italian Cup Final, he collects a second as Parma beat Marseille 3-0 to lift the UEFA Cup.

JUN 3, 2000
Breaks a hand in a Euro 2000 warm-up game against Norway in Oslo and misses the tournament in Belgium and Holland.

AUG 26, 2001
After signing for Juventus he makes his debut for the club in a 4-0 win over Venezia on the first day of the Serie A season.

impressed. When reserve keeper Nista first joined Parma, he phoned his agent after a couple of weeks and said to him: "What did you sign me up with this lot for? They have a phenomenal youth-team lad who is a much better keeper than me."

With his first-choice out, Scala had drafted the young Buffon into the first-team squad as cover. And after watching him train for a week with such names as Fabio Cannavaro, Gianfranco Zola and, Hristo Stoichkov, he became convinced that the youngster was up to the task.

Which indeed he was, with his debut making him something of an overnight sensation in Italy.

It was not just that he made three spectacular saves – from Stefano Eranio, Roberto Baggio and Marco Simone – to earn a 0-0 home draw, it was also that he performed with a staggering sense of self-belief and security.

That night, with telling foresight, Italian TV did a major number along the lines of a "A Star Has Been Born". After all, this lad came with a lot of black type in his football pedigree.

Both his parents had been Italian national shot-putters, while a not-so-distant relative, Lorenzo Buffon, kept goal for Italy 15 times and played for Milan, Genoa, Internazionale and Fiorentina in the 1950s and early 1960s.

Speaking to RAI after the game, the young Buffon said: "I didn't go looking for advice from my relative because, in all modesty, I don't go around asking people how you make a good save.

"If I can manage it myself, then good. If not, no problem."

If Buffon's start to his professional career was auspicious, the same applied even more emphatically to his senior international debut, two years later, in a World Cup play-off tie against Russia.

Having been forced into the play-offs when they finished behind Glenn Hoddle's England in their qualifying group, the Italy side coached by Cesare Maldini travelled to Moscow in late October 1997 in a certain state of apprehension.

In a group which had appeared to be going their way following a 1-0 win against England at Wembley in February's qualifier, Italy found themselves staring at the possibility of failing to make the finals after a 0-0 draw at home to England.

Moscow is always a daunting enough away venue, but that first play-off was played in a mini-blizzard on a potato patch of a pitch.

Buffon, by this stage the first-choice Parma keeper, had travelled to Russia as back-up for first-choice Gianluca Pagliuca. And, once again, an injury opened the way for him, as Pagliuca had to come off after only 32 minutes.

Notwithstanding the blizzard, the impossible pitch and the prize at stake, Buffon's cool, his self-confidence and his abundant natural talent did the business. Italy held onto a 1-1 draw, going on to clinch their place in France 98 with a 1-0 win in the Naples return two weeks later.

The Parma-Milan game and that World Cup play-off underline a fundamental aspect of Buffon's remarkable career. Put simply, he is a rare animal: someone who started at the very top of the tree and continued to keep on rising. For starters, he set the bar as high as it could go and then he managed to rise even higher.

That, perhaps, is the reason why, earlier this year, sports daily *La Gazzetta dello Sport* provocatively suggested that Buffon was the greatest Italian footballer of all time, picking him ahead of such as Giuseppe Meazza, Sandro Mazzola, Gianni Rivera, Paolo Maldini, Roberto Baggio, Francesco Totti and others for a number of splendid reasons.

He might not have scored the goals or pulled off the inventions that were the

Bright future...during his Parma days

Success...after beating Belgium at Euro 2016

> "In all modesty, I don't go around asking people how you make a good save. If I can manage it myself, then good. If not, no problem"
>
> **The teenage Buffon**

MAY 28, 2003
Despite saving two spot-kicks in the shoot-out, Juventus lose the Champions League Final to Milan on penalties after a 0-0 draw.

MAY 14, 2006
Although Juventus win the league they are relegated due to the *Calciopoli* scandal, but he opts to remain with the club.

JUL 9, 2006
Becomes a World Cup winner as Italy beat France on penalties after a 1-1 draw in the Final in Berlin.

NOV 18, 2006
Receives his first red card when sent off playing for Juventus in Serie B against AlbinoLeffe.

MAY 6, 2012
Juventus win their first title since returning to Serie A and he finishes the season with 21 clean sheets.

trademark signature of all those wonderful Italian talents previously mentioned. But Buffon has had a truly glorious 22-year long, record-breaking career that has not only seen him play in five World Cup finals tournaments (winning one in 2006) but in which he has emerged as one of the great captains of the modern game.

Buffon is a player who commands tremendous respect from team-mates and opponents alike.

If there is a moment when the captain needs to stand up and be counted, then Buffon stands up.

When, on the eve of the Euro 2012 finals in Poland and Ukraine, Cesare Prandelli's Italy squad was hit by a tsunami of judicial "notifications", some of them relevant to the ongoing "Last Bet" match-fixing investigation, captain Buffon made himself heard.

The most sensational Italian problem concerned left-back Domenico Criscito, who was dropped from the squad because of his alleged involvement in a Lazio-Genoa match fix. In a highly animated press conference at the federation training centre in Coverciano, Florence, Buffon rounded on the Italian media, asking: "How come all those TV cameras were here early in the morning [when Criscito was taken in for questioning in a police blitz]?

"That was just making a total spectacle of the thing.

"The most serious thing is that you lot all know [about police actions] ahead of time...this is just a disgrace."

Respect...Buffon addresses the media

Victory...the UEFA Cup Final in 1999

Buffon's angry tirade could not save Criscito, who was finally cleared of any illegal or improper behaviour by Genoa investigators in September 2012 but who in the meantime had missed the Euro 2012 finals. Both coach Prandelli and team director Demetrio Albertini argued that if he travelled to Poland then the issue would continue to dominate Italy's preparations, as well as perhaps undermining Criscito's peace of mind.

Buffon had not saved Criscito but he had made his point. His willingness to defiantly defend his team-mate served to create the classic "them against us" spirit which united a team that, to the surprise of many, eventually went all the way to the Final, before losing to Spain.

Two recent incidents with Juventus underline the weight of his role and his words. On the October 2015 night when Juventus lost to Sassuolo, Buffon got on his high horse again. After that defeat, in their 10th game of the season, Juve were in 12th place in the league, on 12 points, just above the relegation zone.

That defeat proved to be a turning point. After the game, Buffon went on TV to rubbish his own team, speaking of an "indecent" and "graceless" Juve performance. It may be just a coincidence that next time out Juventus got back on the winning path against city rivals Torino, thus initiating an astonishing comeback run which saw them pick up 73 out of a possible 75 points, with 24 wins and one draw as they stormed to the title.

Juve fans will be glad to hear Buffon has reportedly been at it again this season, criticising his own team after a disappointing 1-1 draw in the Champions League with Lyon in early November. This time, reportedly, the criticism came in the privacy of the dressing room.

No less a source than *Gazzetta* claimed that Buffon had attacked his team-mates, saying that it is all very easy to win in Italy, where just about every team "backs off" against Juventus, but it is quite another to win in the Champions League where nobody backs off. The incident provoked a row between Juventus and the paper, but it sounds like just the sort of thing Buffon would have said.

Curiously, too, Juve won their next two Champions League games beating Sevilla 3-1 away and Dinamo Zagreb 2-0 at home to top their Group and earn themselves a second-round clash with Porto. Another coincidence?

Buffon has no false modesty about the nature of his role as goalkeeper-captain. In an interview with former Italian deputy prime minister Walter Veltroni he recently said: "In the first place you have got to transmit confidence to the team and

JULY 1, 2012

Italy are taken apart by a rampant Spain in the Final of Euro 2012, losing 4-0.

OCT 11, 2013

Surpasses Fabio Cannavaro as Italy's most-capped player, making his 137th appearance in a 2-2 World Cup qualifying draw with Denmark.

NOV 24, 2013

Plays his 500th Serie A game and keeps a clean sheet as Juventus win 2-0 away to Livorno.

MAR 16, 2014

Saves the 20th penalty of his career in a 1-0 win at Genoa and also equals Dino Zoff's 476 games for the club.

you've got to do that even if that is not the way you are really feeling.

"You've got to look like you are in control and that your team-mates can trust you...you need mental strength."

A goalkeeper's role brings a very cruel, if very banal pressure. If he makes a serious mistake, he concedes a goal. If an outfield player makes a mistake, its impact is not usually so dramatic. So how does Buffon deal with his, admittedly rare, mistakes?

"You have got to pretend that, having made a mistake, you just slipped up but you didn't fall," he says. "You've got to immediately get back on your feet, ready to restart."

Curiously, if injuries to team-mates provided the opportunity for both his professional and international debuts, the same thing seems to have happened when it came to opting for the role of goalkeeper. As a youngster growing up in Carrara, Tuscany – the town where Michelangelo used to collect the marble for his sculptures – Buffon much preferred to play in midfield.

However, when the first-choice keeper in one of his teams was injured, Buffon stepped in with excellent results.

Always a big lad – as an adult, Buffon stands 6ft 3in tall and weighs in at 13st – he had the physical requirements. Furthermore, his initial experience of playing in midfield meant that he was comfortable with the ball at his feet as well as being sharp and explosive between the posts.

When a Tuscany-based Parma scout signalled him to the club, they immediately snapped him up, stealing him from under the noses of Bologna and Milan. Legend has it that youth-team coach Ermes Folgoni told the club that they had to sign this 13-year-old, otherwise they "would be making a huge mistake". A World Cup title, 167 Italian caps, seven Serie A league titles and 25 years later, Buffon has proved Folgoni right.

With Buffon having announced he will retire after the 2018 World Cup, what remains for him? Well, firstly, he would love to lead Juventus to Champions League success, lifting one of the few trophies that has thus far eluded him.

Now in his 16th season with Juve, he commands a place in the hearts of their fans. Along with fellow club idol Alessandro Del Piero, he did not abandon Juventus in their most recent, darkest hour when they were relegated to Serie B in 2006 because of the *Calciopoli* match-fixing schemes of then sports director Luciano Moggi. He played through all of that epic Serie B season, one in which Juventus visited new destinations, stretching from La Spezia to Rimini and from Frosinone to Mantova, prior to returning to Serie A.

If and when Buffon brings down the curtain on his career after Russia, then the wheel will have swung full circle from that snowy October night in Moscow in 1997 when he made his international debut. That, however, will not be the end of Buffon's ties to football since he has already made it clear that he would not object to the job of national team coach.

Tongue in cheek, he has suggested that he would prefer this to the stress of daily club coaching. Maybe he is not joking. Maybe, he intends to do what he has always done and start at the top. **WS**

Number one...Buffon's Italy shirt

Pinnacle...winning the World Cup in 2006

Despair...Alessandro Del Piero and Buffon after Champions League Final in 2003

> "You've got to look like you are in control and that your team-mates can trust you...you need mental strength"
>
> **On being a captain**

JUN 6, 2015

Appears in his second Champions League Final, but is again on the losing side as Barcelona beat Juventus 3-1.

MAR 20, 2016

Sets a record of 974 minutes without conceding a goal in Serie A, stretching back 10 games, before Andrea Belotti scores for Torino.

NOV 6, 2016

Makes his 600th Serie A appearance in Juventus' 2-1 win away to Chievo.

Gianluigi Buffon

the numbers game

MONEY TALKS

€53m His transfer fee from Parma to Juventus in 2001 remains a world record for a keeper

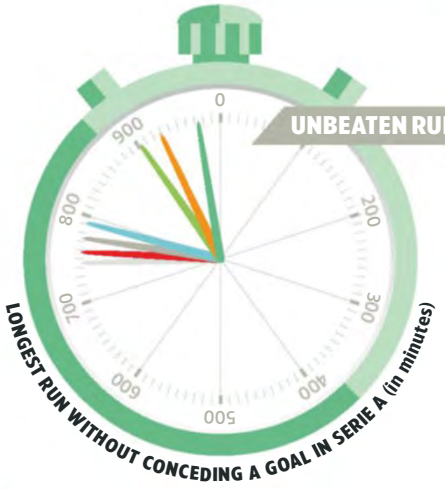
5 One of only three players, along with Antonio Carbajal and Lothar Matthaus, to have taken part in five World Cups: **1998**, **2002**, **2006**, **2010** and **2014**

ITALY

167

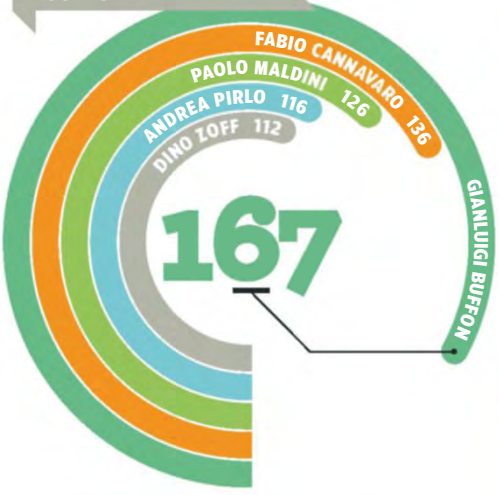
CAPS

UNBEATEN RUN

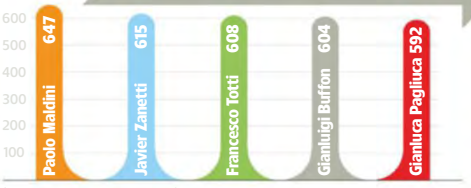


GIANLUIGI BUFFON	(Juventus, 2015-16)	974 mins
SEBASTIANO ROSSI	(Milan 1993-94)	929
DINO ZOFF	(Juventus 1972-73)	903
MARIO DA POZZO	(Genoa 1963-64)	792
IVAN PELIZZOLI	(Roma 2003-04)	774
DAVIDE PINATO	(Atalanta 1997-98)	758
GIANLUIGI BUFFON	(Juventus, 2013-14)	745
LUCA MARCHEGIANI	(Lazio 1997-98)	745

MOST-CAPPED ITALIAN



ALL-TIME SERIE A APPEARANCES



(* up to and inc 22.12.16)

HONOURS

PARMA					
UEFA Cup	1999				
Italian Cup	1999				
Italian Super Cup	1999				
JUVENTUS					
Serie A	2002	2003	2005*	2006*	
	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Serie B	2007				
Italian Cup	2015	2016			
Italian Super Cup	2002	2003	2012	2013	2015
ITALY					
World Cup	2006				

(* titles later revoked)

GAMES (*up to & including 08.01.16)

Champions League Ones to watch

We turn the spotlight on some of the players who could make a difference in the Champions League knockout stage

MONACO

THOMAS LEMAR

Monegasque starlet taking Ligue 1 by storm

There are a good few reasons why Monaco have been able to get their noses in front of red-hot favourites Paris Saint-Germain in the race for the French championship this season.

The shrewd tactics of coach Leonardo Jardim, Fabinho's lung-busting midfield performances, the rebirth of Radamel Falcao, the defensive work of Djibril Sidibe – they are just some of the key drivers. However, it's probably the emergence of 21-year-old attacking midfielder Thomas Lemar as a world-class talent that has done most to light Monaco's fire.

Lemar's tally of six goals and four assists at the halfway stage of the club's Ligue 1 campaign is a decent return for a young player. But the statistic that should really make Europe sit up and take notice is that he was the second-most successful dribbler during the Champions League group stage, with 20 completed – which was just two behind Neymar, but one ahead of Lionel Messi.

Born in Baie-Mahault on the French Caribbean island of Guadeloupe, Lemar was marked out as a special talent from his earliest days. Consistently playing above his age group, he was first spotted by European scouts in 2008.

Talent...Lemar is a fans' favourite at Monaco

"Thomas was both younger and much smaller than the other boys," recalls Caen talent-spotter Philippe Tranchant, who first noticed Lemar at a training camp on the island. "But he stood head and shoulders above the rest as a footballer.

"With the ball at his feet he was already technically exceptional."

Despite interest from 10 other clubs, Tranchant took the youngster to France in 2010 to start his footballing education at Caen's academy in Normandy. Fellow islander Ronald Zubar, who went on to play for Marseille and Wolverhampton Wanderers, had begun his career at Caen a decade earlier.

Quickly identified by the French national set-up as one to watch, Lemar first wore the famous blue shirt as an under-17, and went on to represent France at under-18, under-19 and under-20 levels.

Tranchant was sure Lemar had what it takes to become a top talent, explaining: "He's a creative player, who's extremely gifted technically."

But the coach was also quick to point out: "Thomas doesn't have the athleticism to be a ball-winning midfielder. In many ways he avoids challenges, because his game is all about anticipation. But if he keeps his head straight he'll go far."

After signing his first professional contract with Caen in March 2013, Lemar made his first-team debut at the age of 17 on the opening day of the Ligue 2 season, replacing former French international Jerome Rothen in a 3-1 win over Dijon.

The teenager went on to make seven appearances during a campaign that saw Caen promoted to Ligue 1. But it was during the following season that people really began to pay attention.

Decisive...Thomas Lemar scores against Tottenham Hotspur at Wembley Stadium

Things didn't start well for Lemar and just 41 minutes into his first Ligue 1 game, against Lorient in October 2014, he was forced to leave the pitch with a splitting headache and racing heartbeat. Doctors later decided he'd suffered from what's known as "tachycardia", where the heart starts beating too fast. Fortunately tests revealed there was nothing serious and he was soon back in action again, enjoying a fine campaign.

> **"Thomas is the future of French football and is a perfect fit for our project here at Monaco"**
>
> **Vadim Vasilyev, Monaco vice-president**

A number of bigger clubs, including Lyon and Bordeaux, were beginning to show an interest, but it was Monaco who made the decisive move, signing Lemar on a five-year deal for a fee of €4million in June 2015.

"Thomas is the future of French football and is a perfect fit for our project here at Monaco," said the club's vice-president

Vadim Vasilyev on signing the youngster.

After an impressive debut, in which he came off the bench to score against Toulouse, Lemar enjoyed an outstanding first season, scoring five goals in 34 games. Monaco fans really took to his dazzling ability and his effectiveness, either in central midfield or out wide, but as the current campaign kicked off they weren't the only ones appreciating his talent.

Tottenham Hotspur supporters witnessed a fine strike at Wembley that secured a 2-1 win for Monaco in September, and then French national coach Didier Deschamps called Lemar into the senior squad in November, handing him a first cap, as a substitute against Ivory Coast.

Despite only having established himself as a Monaco regular this term, such is the buzz around Lemar that many of Europe's biggest clubs are now sniffing around.

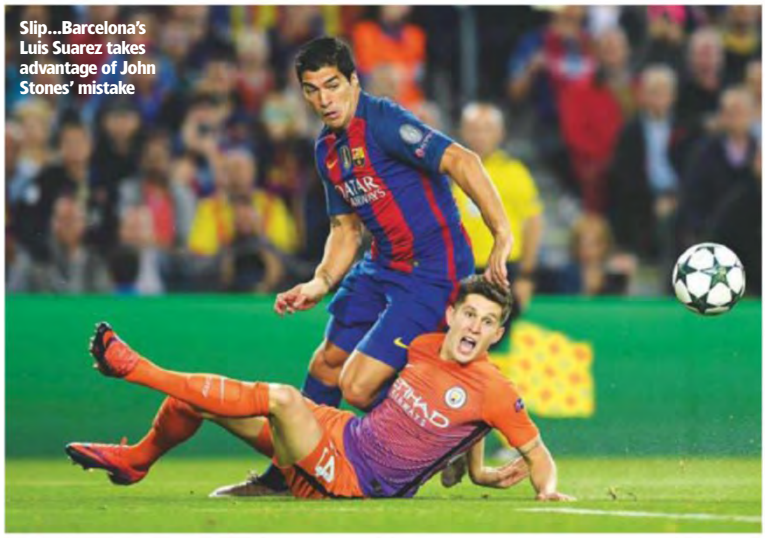
But the player who rates Andres Iniesta as his footballing hero remains every bit as humble as the Barcelona man, saying: "All I want to do is keep working hard to make a difference on the pitch and help my team as much as I can."

So far, so good.

Howard Johnson

ROUND OF 16
FIRST LEG
February 21
Manchester City v Monaco
Bayer Leverkusen v Atletico Madrid

ROUND OF 16
SECOND LEG
March 15
Monaco v Manchester City
Atletico Madrid v Bayer Leverkusen



Slip...Barcelona's Luis Suarez takes advantage of John Stones' mistake

MANCHESTER CITY
JOHN STONES

When City splashed £47.5millon on the England defender last summer it was widely reported that Everton had reluctantly cashed in a player whose ambition they could not satisfy.

The 22-year-old was expected to be a central plank of Pep Guardiola's revolution in Manchester – but things haven't turned out quite as expected.

"I don't know what's happening with him, he's making mistake after mistake," says former England captain Alan Shearer.

Despite a difficult first season, Stones is still a talent, and the Champions League encounters with a free-scoring Monaco side will offer an opportunity to remind the rest of Europe of his undoubted ability.

Shoot more... Ferreira-Carrasco

ATLETICO MADRID
YANNICK FERREIRA-CARRASCO

On the scoresheet in last season's Champions League Final, the Belgian is the perfect counterpoint to Atletico's defensive set-up. Now coach Diego Simeone says he wants the winger to do less running and more shooting.

All action...defensive midfielder Kevin Kampl

BAYER LEVERKUSEN
KEVIN KAMPL

Besides an extraordinary appetite for exertion and defensive work rate, the all-action Slovenian midfielder also manages to find the time for penetrative attacking play. And, crucially, it was the 26-year-old who scored the winner in Leverkusen's 1-0 group phase victory at Wembley against Tottenham Hotspur.

BAYERN MUNICH

THIAGO ALCANTARA

Spanish playmaker who is thriving in Carlo Ancelotti's new-look side

In Germany they call him *Der Ballverteiler* (the ball distributor) and this season the attacking midfielder has excelled in the role, establishing himself as the man Bayern Munich cannot do without.

Little wonder the club's supporters are so enamoured with him. Now in his fourth season in Bavaria, following a €25million transfer from Barcelona, Thiago is in the form of his life at the moment. Authoritatively and stylishly directing manoeuvres, he fizzes with ideas and strategic class.

While many of Bayern's stars took their time to adjust to the methods and philosophy of new coach Ancelotti, the

> **Thiago is in the form of his life at the moment...he fizzes with ideas and strategic class**

25-year-old Thiago was on message from day one and would be rewarded in December when "Carletto" effectively decided to redesign the team around him, switching from a 4-3-3 to a 4-2-3-1 formation and installing him as the advanced central playmaker.

Ancelotti knows a good thing when he sees it. Thanks to his ability on the ball, vision and sharp mind, Thiago is a natural number 10 – as he proved it in the 3-0 destruction of Bundesliga title rivals RB Leipzig a week before Christmas, scoring one, making another and involved in all of his team's most dangerous moves. It was a man-of-the-match display if ever there was one.

Thiago was initially brought to the

Important...Thiago is Bayern's creative hub

Freedom...Thiago can express himself more under Ancelotti

In control...keeping Atletico Madrid's Koke at bay

Allianz-Arena in the summer of 2013 on the recommendation of then-Bayern coach Pep Guardiola, who famously told the board: "It's him or no one."

Although very much Guardiola's disciple, the irony is that Thiago appears altogether far more productive with Ancelotti at the helm. Yet the player would never criticise his mentor Guardiola, who would dearly love to still be working with the Spaniard.

However, it does seem that Thiago has more freedom to express himself nowadays. Better suited to a more direct, no-frills operation; one that is less based

on endless possession.

Within the Guardiola system he was the loyal lieutenant, used in all manner of different ways in the middle of the park; essentially a player to complement others. But for Ancelotti he is the nerve centre.

The Spanish-born son of Mazinho – the Brazil midfielder who was a World Cup winner in 1994 – Thiago's one fault line is his susceptibility to injury. A large proportion of his first two years at Bayern were marred by ruptured ligaments in his right knee, and during the club's recent training camp in Doha he ominously tweaked a hamstring.

Bayern can only hope he recovers promptly. Their hopes of Champions League progress against Arsenal may depend on it.

Nick Bidwell

ROUND OF 16
FIRST LEG
February 15
Bayern Munich v Arsenal
Real Madrid v Napoli

ROUND OF 16
SECOND LEG
March 7
Arsenal v Bayern Munich
Napoli v Real Madrid

ARSENAL
OLIVIER GIROUD

The assumption that Giroud is not a world-class striker was severely tested by his recent "scorpion kick" against Crystal Palace – a goal that was hailed by his manager Arsene Wenger as the greatest he had seen at the Emirates stadium.

Arsenal have been linked with Edinson Cavani and Karim Benzema as supposed upgrades on Giroud, who thrives on the physical side of the game but has often seemed an uneasy fit alongside the team's pack of diminutive playmakers. Yet the big French centre-forward offers more of a cutting edge than the injury-prone Theo Walcott or summer signing Lucas Perez.

And with Walcott still edging back from injury, and Wenger preferring to play Alexis Sanchez as a wide attacker, Giroud could yet spring a surprise against familiar foes Bayern Munich in the Champions League.

Cutting edge... Olivier Giroud

Vital goals... Sergio Ramos

REAL MADRID
SERGIO RAMOS

For all the talk of Ronaldo, Bale and Benzema, Real's most important source of goals has often been their captain. Scorer of his side's goal in last season's Champions League Final, he has weighed in with crucial goals again this term, not least the equaliser in the *Clasico* against Barcelona.

But it has not all been plain sailing for Ramos, who scored an own goal in the defeat at Sevilla that ended his side's record unbeaten run.

He brushed off the hostile reception at his former club, saying: "Whether the fans here whistle me a little more or a little less, Sevilla always will be my house. When I'm buried, there will be two flags: those of Real and Sevilla."

NAPOLI
DRIES MERTENS

Fears that Napoli would be short of goals following the sale of Gonzalo Higuain to Juventus and Arkadiusz Milik's long-term knee injury have proved unfounded so far.

The switching of Dries Mertens to an improvised centre-forward role has seen the Belgian wide man enjoy his best season for the Italian side, and by the end of December he had already surpassed his goals tally in each of his three previous seasons in Naples.

Goals in the vital Champions League group games against Benfica were followed by a goalfest in Serie A.

There were four goals, including a nine-minute first-half hat-trick, in a 5-3 thriller against Torino. And they followed three goals in the previous weekend's 5-0 thrashing of Cagliari – as he became the first player to score consecutive hat-tricks in Serie A since 1974.

Switch...Dries Mertens is playing centre-forward

SEVILLA

SAMIR NASRI

New lease of life in Spain

Earlier this season, Sevilla coach Jorge Sampaoli said that Samir Nasri makes his team "breathe". The feeling is mutual.

There is new life in the Frenchman, just as he hoped there would be. Asked why he had chosen to move to the Sanchez Pizjuan in the summer, one of the reasons Nasri offered in response was simple: "Sevilla," he said, "is a club that revives a lot of footballers."

They have revived him too, as he has been among La Liga's most outstanding players this season, probably the best of all the new arrivals, and the team have turned into title contenders.

"Nasri is such a '*potrero*' that you'd think he was South American," says Sampaoli. "He has that amateur's spirit where you want to enjoy the game. He is like a player from a different era."

Coming from Sampaoli that is quite the compliment. *Potrero* – which, loosely translated, means a footballer forged on rough ground in informal matches, skilful and streetwise – is the description usually applied to Diego Maradona, and Sampaoli claimed that the fact Maradona had played at Sevilla was one of the reasons he chose to coach there in the first place.

> **"You'd think he was South American...he is like a player from a different era"**
>
> Sevilla coach Jorge Sampaoli

Few doubted Nasri's talent, but the extent of his success still comes as a surprise. "When you see him play, you can see why he was at some of the biggest clubs in the world," Sampaoli says of the former Arsenal and Manchester City midfielder. Yet he left them too, and his departure from City was neither a huge shock nor one that supporters felt especially saddened about. Nasri says that Pep Guardiola wanted him to stay, but there was no fight to keep him. Not least because his own mind was made.

Conversations with Monchi, Sevilla's sporting director, and Adil Rami, their French central defender, helped to convince Nasri, who also spoke to Guardiola and to City's Spaniards about the club. "I asked Navas, Silva, Nolito about the club and the city, and it was all good. Good food, pretty girls," he told *Onze Mondial*.

Sevilla were the right club at the right time; the perfect environment. When Sevilla came with the offer of a one-year loan, it was an attractive proposition – and that was back when no one could predict just how well things would go. Sevilla are through to the knockout phase of the Champions League and in second place in the league, ahead of Barcelona and just one point behind Real Madrid, after ending their 40-match unbeaten run.

Revived...Samir Nasri

He has been vital to that success, helping the team breathe; he has also been a beneficiary. In the end, Sevilla paid a €3.5million fee to City. It was a bargain and the fans are delighted. There is just one problem: they have no option to buy at the end of the year. If there were doubts about the departure, about leaving a club like City, Nasri did not share them.

"I needed a change," Nasri explained. "I had lots of injuries last year and I needed to start afresh. If you know anything about football, you know that Sevilla have taken lots of players back to the top, they have got them back to what they used to be.

"Luis Fabiano wasn't [playing] well when he went there and he eventually left having scored lots of goals. Kanoute, Banega, Rakitic. So I knew Sevilla were the perfect club for me: a family club but ambitious, with good players and a coach who came with a challenge.

"I spoke to Guardiola and he told me what a great coach [Sevilla's assistant] Juanma Lillo is. That was all I needed to know."

That judgment was vindicated. A few weeks later, the season underway and the displays impressive, he told *L'Equipe*: "I have a relationship of trust with [Sampaoli]. It is thanks to him and his assistant [Lillo] that I am here. They have given me strength and confidence, and put me in the best conditions."

In the best position, too. He has played consistently and he has played where he likes to play, given a certain freedom but

Responsibility...Nasri is thriving in a more central role

handed responsibility with it. No longer on the wing, he has become the central midfielder that he always thought he was. Often the furthest forward of the midfielders and just as often the furthest back too, he has become their playmaker, all over the pitch, always moving the ball, close to the play, invariably in contact. Playing and making others play, too. "My position is *pivote*," he said.

On the way back from Zagreb, where Sevilla had played Dinamo, the club's former Serbian defender Ivica Dragutinovic said: "There's one player that raises the level of everyone: Nasri."

That night, Nasri had set a new Champions league record by completing 145 passes – only three fewer than the entire Dinamo team put together.

Sid Lowe

ROUND OF 16
FIRST LEG
February 22
Sevilla v Leicester City
Porto v Juventus

ROUND OF 16
SECOND LEG
March 14
Leicester City v Sevilla
Juventus v Porto

Solid...Ivan Marcano

PORTO
IVAN MARCANO

Signed in 2014 as part of the "Spanishification" of Porto under former coach Julen Lopetegui, Marcano was a consistent performer despite two hugely disappointing seasons for the club.

Outstanding this term in a rock-solid partnership at the heart of the defence with Felipe Monteiro this term, Porto conceded just 13 goals in their first 30 games. And he is also useful at the other end of the pitch, scoring four goals to date.

Classy...Marko Pjaca (left)

JUVENTUS
MARKO PJACA

Fully operational again after three months out with a complicated injury to the fibula in his left leg – a sorry tale of conflicting diagnoses – the classy Croat winger will give Juve even more attacking options in the months ahead. Especially strong when cutting inside from the left-flank, he was bought for €23million last summer from Dinamo Zagreb.

Disciplined... Wilfred Ndidi

LEICESTER CITY
WILFRED NDIDI

Signed in January from Genk for £15million, the Nigerian could be the midfielder that Leicester have been looking for since the departure of N'Golo Kante.

While Chelsea's form has soared with Kante in their ranks, so Leicester have struggled. And while Ndidi's arrival may not solve all their problems – particularly a failure to defend at set-pieces – his discipline will help them compete on two fronts: a potential relegation battle in the Premier League and a journey into the unknown in the Champions League.

BENFICA

NELSON SEMEDO

Right-back lighting up Lisbon's Estadio da Luz

Nowhere is Portugal's current overflowing talent pool better illustrated than at right-back. Cedric Soares was almost flawless at Euro 2016 and is thriving at Southampton, Valencia's Joao Cancelo scored three goals in his first four starts for the national side and Ricardo Pereira is one of the driving forces behind Nice's sensational season in France. Yet many believe that Nelson Semedo can be better than all of them.

Lisbon-born Semedo burst onto the scene at the start of last season when he was thrust into the first team following Maxi Pereira's sale to Porto. The Uruguayan had been a mainstay of the Benfica defence for a decade and his defection to their bitter rivals from the north was a massive story in the summer of 2015. However, when the new season kicked off, he was soon forgotten, if not forgiven.

Utterly nerveless, Semedo debuted with a competent display in the season-opening Super Cup clash against Sporting. A week later, Nelsinho – as he is nicknamed – ended a typically marauding incursion into opposition territory with a fine goal on his home debut against Estoril.

> **"Semedo has a very similar style to the way I played: defending well but providing very strong support to the attack"**
>
> Ex-Brazil right-back Cafu

Only 21 at the time, and with no previous top-flight experience, he grabbed his chance with gusto. Impressive going forward, with neat link-up play and excellent crossing and shooting ability, his sleight frame and spindly limbs mask outstanding lung power, motoring non-stop up and down his flank.

In less than two months he had won over Portugal coach Fernando Santos, who selected him for a Euro qualifier against Serbia. However, it was a bittersweet moment for the defender, who made an assured debut, only to fracture a bone in a knee, which ruined the rest of his season.

Stunning...Nelson Semedo celebrates his goal against Besiktas

But concerns that the long lay-off may rein in his fearless attacking style or halt his development proved unfounded. He has made a flying start to this campaign and taken his game to the next level as Benfica chase a fourth straight Portuguese title.

And there is high praise for him from such as former Brazil right-back Cafu, who says: "Now I'm retired I follow Portuguese football closely. Semedo has a very similar style to the way I played: defending well but providing very strong support to the attack. As long as he keeps a level head and is himself he will go far."

The way Semedo has flourished every time he has stepped up a level, sometimes in difficult circumstances, certainly points to a winning mentality.

In January, the notoriously hostile crowd at Vitoria Guimaraes had been giving the right-back a hard time during a match that would decide who reached the League Cup semi-finals. The fiery atmosphere, allegedly including racial abuse, only served to spur on Semedo.

After setting up the opening goal, he made a "keep on talking" gesture to the crowd with his hand, triggering more fury from the stands, including chairs being thrown onto the pitch and a hold-up in play. Questioned as to whether his player had incited the home supporters, Benfica coach Rui Vitoria replied: "Nelson played a fantastic match. I didn't understand what happened, but if there is a well balanced and composed player in football, Nelson is one of them. I only expect good things from him because he's a good lad."

The opinion that Semedo is the diametric opposite of a troublemaker is backed up by Luis Loureiro, his former boss at Fatima, where he played on loan. "He's

Happy...Semedo is playing for the club that he has supported all his life

very introverted off the pitch," says Loureiro. "But when he steps onto the grass he is completely transformed.

"With the ball at his feet he is at home and he doesn't fear a thing."

And everything the player himself says suggests that he is a model professional who is savouring every minute of his rapid ascension. In the midst of ongoing negotiations for a new contract that is rumoured to include an €80million buyout clause, Semedo says: "My overriding goal is to help Benfica win trophies and to stay at the club, if possible, until the end of my career. I'm a huge *Benfiquista*, I'm from Lisbon. I feel at home here and it would be a dream to play my whole career here."

Should he continue to shine brightly at the highest level, as when scoring a majestic Champions League goal-of-the-season contender against Besiktas in November, that is unlikely to happen.

Tom Kunder

ROUND OF 16
FIRST LEG
February 14
Benfica v Borussia Dortmund
Paris Saint-Germain v Barcelona

ROUND OF 16
SECOND LEG
March 8
Borussia Dortmund v Benfica
Barcelona v Paris Saint-Germain

Ever-present... Christian Pulisic

BORUSSIA DORTMUND
CHRISTIAN PULISIC

The teenage American winger has featured in every one of the Ruhr club's Champions League group games so far this season – which has been a major vote of confidence in an 18-year-old with less than 20 starts for the club.

Lucky charm... Samuel Umtiti

BARCELONA
SAMUEL UMTITI

The powerful French international centre-back, signed from Lyon in the off-season, has enjoyed the perfect start to life as a *Blaugrana*, quickly adapting to a new and demanding way of defending and proving something of a lucky charm too. Whenever he plays, Barca tend to win.

Home-grown...Paris-born Alphonse Areola

PARIS SAINT-GERMAIN
ALPHONSE AREOLA

When he took charge of PSG last summer, Spanish coach Unai Emery stuck with Kevin Trapp as his first-choice keeper. But it did not take long for him to become aware of the talents of home-grown Areola.

Born in Paris, he starred in France's Under-20 World Cup in 2013 and made his Champions League debut against Arsenal in September last year, remaining in the starting line-up ever since. After loans at Lens, Bastia and Villarreal, he now looks set to be a fixture for years to come.

6 of the best Europa League talents

Nick Bidwell selects the players who could star in the competition's knockout stage

1 Leon BAILEY

GENK

Thursday nights in the Europa League obviously suit the Jamaican winger, who has seven goals in his 12 appearances in the competition so far this term, including a stunning strike from long distance in the group phase against Rapid Vienna.

And it's easy to see why the 19-year-old is being linked with clubs such as Roma, Monaco, Ajax and several in the Premier League. He has two good feet – though the left is undoubtedly the stronger – can go inside or out, has explosive speed and always seems safe in the knowledge that, sooner or later, he will beat his man.

Rumoured to be interested in taking up Belgian citizenship and playing for the *Diables Rouges*, he has been in Europe since the age of 14, cutting his teeth in Austria and Slovakia before making his debut for Genk in August 2015.

2 Andriy BORYACHUK

SHAKHTAR DONETSK

Mobile, homegrown front man whose habitat this season has been the final-act spotlight, appearing from the bench to score in Ukrainian league games against Volyn Lutsk and Zirka Kropyvnytskyi, and also looking sharp in a couple of European cameos, versus Konyaspor and Braga.

Smallish and elusive, the 20-year-old is at his most dangerous in a false-nine brief, often dropping deep to collect the ball. He is comfortable in build-up play and is not short of a trick or two – such as the cheeky backheeled goal with which he took the Volyn rearguard by surprise.

Shakhtar fans have high hopes for him and in a recent newspaper poll a majority called for Boryachuk to start more regularly, possibly at the expense of Argentinian striker Facundo Ferreyra.

3 Loic PERRIN

SAINT-ETIENNE

Centre-back and captain of *Les Verts*, he is likely to be a key figure when his side face Manchester United. His challenge will be to nullify the threat of the inimitable Zlatan Ibrahimovic, but it's not a task that will frighten him, having gone head-to-head with the Swede on countless occasions during the latter's time at Paris Saint-Germain.

Now 31 and having spent almost two decades at the club, Perrin epitomises what Saint-Etienne's blue-collar fan base look for in a player: loyalty, fight and reliability.

A midfield holder and right-back earlier in his career, he skippered France to victory at the 2005 Toulon Under-20 tournament. He received call-ups to the senior squad in 2014 and 2015 but did not see any action.

4 Giuliano

ZENIT

The Brazilian attacking midfielder or winger is to the Blue-and-Whites of Zenit what Cristiano Ronaldo or Lionel Messi is to Real Madrid or Barcelona: that is, indispensable.

Bought for €7million last summer from Porto Alegre outfit Gremio, he has already paid back much of that investment with his impressive work in the first-half of the season.

In the Europa League alone he had registered six goals and five assists by Christmas, and he proved particularly influential in the 4-3 group win at Maccabi Tel Aviv, inspiring an amazing comeback from three-nil down.

A star turn at the 2010 Under-20 World Cup, he has past experience in eastern Europe, spending three-and-a-half campaigns in Ukraine with Dnipro.

5 Manu TRIGUEROS

VILLARREAL

Frequently likened in style to Barcelona's Andres Iniesta, the 25-year-old has been outstanding this term; so much so that many are predicting an imminent invitation to the full Spanish squad.

Comparisons with Iniesta are somewhat inevitable as both come from the central region of Castilla-La Mancha, they are modest and humble, and share the same cultured approach to the game. Only in one crucial area do they differ – while Iniesta was effortlessly rising to the top at Barca, Trigueros was rejected by La Masia at the age of 15, spending only one season at the Catalan club's academy.

He rebuilt his confidence with Murcia B and then headed to Villarreal, where his star has been in the ascendancy ever since. His father, Manuel, played for Atletico Madrid's youth team and younger brother Pablo also played there.

6 Donny VAN DE BEEK

AJAX

If the approval of Ajax legends is anything to go by, the 19-year-old midfielder has every chance of a fine career.

Former winger Sjaak Swart, who was a vital component in the side that took Europe by storm in the early 1970s, is a huge fan, as is Dennis Bergkamp who, while coaching the adolescent Donny in the club's academy, revealed that the kid reminded him of himself at that age.

The teenager boasts all the typical Amsterdammer qualities: the technical finesse, the intelligence, the passing ability, and such is his versatility that no one is quite sure whether his future lies as a holder, a box-to-box man or number 10.

Not yet an automatic starter, but did his prospects a world of good with excellent displays in the Europa League this season against Standard Liege and Panathinaikos.

Quality control

World Cup expansion is another nail in the coffin of the international game, says Jonathan Wilson

Goalless...Nigeria (in green) and Iran drew 0-0 at the 2014 World Cup

There are easily a hundred reasons for feeling dismay at FIFA's decision to further despoil the World Cup by extending the finals to 48 teams – and at least one of them is tactical.

Football has changed radically over the past 30 years. At the very top, the quality and the level of entertainment are probably higher than they have ever been, but the structures of the world's premier club and national competitions seem increasingly to militate against that.

The symptoms may be different, but the root cause is the same: greed has conquered any notion of sporting integrity.

But there have been other changes, and one of those is how we consume football – which itself has implications, if not for tactics per se then certainly for how the public responds to tactical approaches.

In the 1980s, it was common for people in England to say, without irony or affectation, that their favourite time of the season was FA Cup third-round weekend. It had a romance, a sense of democracy that appealed to a sense of what English football was all about. It wasn't a franchise system like you had in US sports, it was an environment in which the lowliest had the chance to rub shoulders with the mightiest. But the reaction to this season's FA Cup third round seemed largely to be boredom, with a shrug, a yawn and a wish for the Premier League to start up again.

During Plymouth Argyle's 0-0 draw away to Liverpool, a remarkable achievement for the League Two side, the BT co-commentator Steve McManaman seemed vaguely affronted by the visitors' defensiveness and kept urging them to "have a go". It's true this was the youngest side in Liverpool's history, and was perhaps more vulnerable than Plymouth manager Derek Adams would have anticipated, but

Foiled...Theofanis Gekas of ultra-defensive Greece has his spot-kick saved by Keylor Navas of Costa Rica in a 2014 World Cup penalty shoot-out

Outnumbered...Liverpool's Ovie Ejaria

it's also true that his side's best chance of forcing a positive result was to sit tight and hope for a goal from a set-play or to draw and take the tie back to Home Park.

It was absolutely Plymouth's right to play like that; it was arguably their responsibility – no matter how boring McManaman or viewers may have found it.

This is the truth of games in which one side is much better than the other. The weaker team has to defend and, while that may be stressful for fans of the club involved, for the casual viewer it's often a little dull.

In the 1980s that mattered less because we saw less. Perhaps just one third-round game was televised, but that had an appeal because it was "live" football and in those days we took what we could get. The other 31 third-round games were played simultaneously at 3pm on the Saturday – and, listening on the radio or watching Teletext, it only took one or two shocks and a couple of other games that were close until the final minutes to feel fulfilling. We didn't actually have to watch the often tedious football that yielded that outcome.

Now, with six games screened live on third-round weekend there is a sense of surfeit and of frustration. Early-round FA Cup games are either Premier League-lite, between two top-flight sides who care less about this competition than the league, or a weak v strong/defence v attack clash.

> More teams at the World Cup means more weaker teams. The argument that Iceland and Wales lit up the Euros holds no water; they were good enough to have qualified anyway

At least in the FA Cup the bigger sides often rest players which means the gulf between, say, top flight and third flight is not as great as it might be – although still greater than it was 30 years ago.

In the Champions League the unequal match-up of sides has devalued the group stage. In every group bar one this season, the wealthiest two clubs went through, and Tottenham Hotspur slipping up at the expense of Bayer Leverkusen is hardly the stuff of fairy tale.

There were a series of games so one-sided they made Christians v Lions look like thrilling end-to-end stuff. Until 2013-14, there had never been a season in which the 96 group games in the Champions League had produced 10 or more games won by four or more goals. In every season since there has been at least 10. This season there were a record 14.

But that's club football, with attacks fluent machines that are honed over days and weeks of training, of learning a common way of playing. At international level, however, that doesn't happen.

International sides are patched together over the course of a couple of weeks. They attack more slowly, are less automated. A forward receiving the ball with his back to goal and a defender breathing down his neck doesn't have the instinctive sense that his right-winger is making a dart beyond the full-back, and the fraction of a second longer it takes for him to realise that can lead to an attack being stifled.

Defending is easier at national level. A disparity between the two sides at top-club level manifests as a victory by four or more goals, while at national level it becomes dull football, as one team defends while the other attacks with less efficiency than they would be able to in the club game.

The last World Cup was unusually high scoring, with 2.70 goals per game. In South Africa 2010 there were just 2.23. In Germany 2006 only 2.30. At the expanded Euro 2016 it was only 2.12. Compare that to the Champions League, whose group stage yielded 2.90 goals per game this season. Or, to the Premier League, a competition that, with six genuine contenders at the start of the season, none of whom were the champions, has legitimate claim as the most competitive high-level league in the world: this season it's producing 2.85 goals per game.

More teams at the World Cup means more weaker teams. The argument that Iceland and Wales lit up the Euros holds no water; they were good enough to have qualified anyway. Expansion, the admission of the weak, means more dull football. Penalty shoot-outs after drawn games only increase the incentive to play negatively. You can't blame poorer teams for playing like that but you can blame the organisers for inviting them.

The hands of greed tighten round the neck of the golden goose. WS

CLUB FOOTBALL v INTERNATIONAL GAME

CLUB FOCUS

WORDS: Nick Bidwell

Forever young

Spotlight on the newcomers taking the Bundesliga by storm

Phenomenal, astounding, sensational. Superlatives trip easily off the tongue when recounting RB Leipzig's deeds in their first few months as members of the Bundesliga fraternity.

Beginning the season with a remarkable run of 13 games unbeaten, they lost just twice, got the better of Borussia Dortmund, Bayer Leverkusen and Schalke, and went into the winter break in second place, just three points behind league leaders Bayern Munich.

So much for the pre-season assertion of the club's director of sport, Ralf Rangnick, who claimed their objective was a "worry free" 2016-17.

In over 50 years of the Bundesliga, no team has ever cut such a dash in its top-flight debut. And in a sure sign ➤

Challenge...Leipzig's Yussuf Poulsen (in red) competes with Omer Toprak of Bayer Leverkusen

of the naked ambition at the Saxon outfit, RB coach Ralph Hasenhuttl already has his sights set on the next goal.

"I think a lot of people are waiting for us to blow up and fall by the wayside," says the former Austria international striker who, prior to being headhunted by the *Leipziger* in the summer, worked wonders to establish Ingolstadt in the German elite.

"Our aim is to continue to improve, to play even better than we did in the first half of the season. We know where we want to go. Right now, I don't see any limits for this team."

Top of the table for three weeks in November and December, and the first east German side to lead the Bundesliga since Hansa Rostock were top in 1991, the rampaging *Roten Bullen* have been likened to Kaiserslautern who, back in 1997-98, became the first and only newly promoted side to win the domestic title. But sporting success apart, the truth is that there are no evident parallels.

Lautern were a club rich in tradition, history and popular support. They had been crowned German champions only seven years previously, in 1991, had a superstar coach in Otto Rehhagel and, with the notable exception of up-and-coming Michael Ballack, were a team of battle-hardened professionals, among them Swiss midfield Ciriaco Sforza, Czech libero Miroslav Kadlec and striker Olaf Marschall – who had begun his career at famous old DDR side Lokomotive Leipzig.

Compare and contrast with what RB

Determined...Leipzig keep out Hertha Berlin

Promotion...Davie Selke soaks director of sport Ralf Rangnick

stand for today. Bankrolled by the Red Bull energy-drink giant and founded as recently as 2009, they have no past pedigree and rely almost totally on youngsters, never recruiting anyone older than 24 and boasting the youngest squad in the Bundesliga with an average age of little more than 23.

For Rangnick, who is regarded by many as the architect of their meteoric rise, the advantages of playing youngsters are clear. "Young players recover quicker and are more willing to learn," he says. "To my mind, the question of experience can be overvalued."

The boldness and vitality of youth is fundamental to RB's physically demanding brand of turbo-charged football. They press high with ferocity, look to regain possession immediately after losing the ball, are masters of the lightning counter-attack and have the conditioning to run opponents into the ground. While other teams fade late on, they remain resolutely in the fast lane – and it's no coincidence that they have scored eight times in the final 15 minutes so far this season.

Exciting times...coach Ralph Hasenhuttl

"Leipzig are one of those full-throttle teams," enthused Mainz coach Martin Schmidt in the wake of a 3-1 loss to RB in November. "If you're not in optimum physical shape when you play them, that's a sin for which you'll be punished.

Leipzig's priorities are not to dominate possession or weave pretty patterns in the middle of the park. They don't as much aspire to control a game as trigger power plays, springing into attack as soon as they win the ball back. A straight-for-the-jugular approach in which their forward runs are religiously choreographed on the training ground and which they hope to bring to a goalscoring conclusion in less than ten seconds.

> "Young players recover quicker and are more willing to learn. To my mind, the question of experience can be overvalued"
> **Director of sport, Ralf Rangnick**

"After we've won the ball, everyone knows what he has to do," says Swedish attacking midfielder Emil Forsberg. "And then it really takes off."

Within this most dynamic and intelligently assembled 4-2-2-2, several individuals have flourished and dazzled. Arguably the most-improved player in the country, the German-Italian Diego Demme does the work of two men in defensive midfield. The bustling Dane, Yussuf Poulsen, and the mobile Timo Werner compliment each other perfectly up front. Meanwhile, central defender and vice-captain Willi Orban has rarely put a foot wrong; tenacious, composed and a good organiser, he is a scorer of vital goals as well.

Understanding... Emil Forsberg

Two players, though, have stood out in particular: Bundesliga rookies Naby Keita and Forsberg.

A Guinean, Keita was brought in last summer from Red Bull sister club Salzburg and wasted no time in establishing himself as the best box-to-box midfielder in the league, while just behind the strikers Forsberg has proved irresistible, scoring five and making a further nine. They are a double act of pure box-office magic.

Although no one expected RB to emerge as genuine title contenders this season, it also needs to be said that nobody saw them as relegation fodder either. On approaching the starting grid in August, they were better funded and prepared than any other new boys. Red Bull sports projects tend not to involve half-measures, and from the moment company owner Dietrich Mateschitz bought the licence of fifth-tier Leipzig side SV Markranstadt in 2009, it was full steam ahead as they built a club from scratch at express speed

In pursuit of a place in the Bundesliga and European sun, nothing was left to

Upset...Leipzig's Naby Keita beats Borussia Dortmund goalkeeper Roman Burki at the Red Bull Arena

chance. The club's organisation was stuffed from top to bottom with highly competent, innovative people. The 2012 appointment as director of sport of ex-Hoffenheim and Schalke coach Rangnick was especially important and €35million was spent on a state-of-the-art training facility and a huge transfer war-chest.

Those who hate the RB model look at the €100m they have spent on new players in the past three years and claim they have skewed the playing field by going in for financial doping. But is it that simple?

Spending loads of money on personnel is no guarantee of success, and contrary to what their critics say there is much to be admired in the *Leipziger* recruitment policy. Such as the exclusive targeting of youngsters of vast potential, and carefully calibrating the skill set and the personality to each position. No has-beens or jaded seniors need apply.

> "We know where we want to go. Right now, I don't see any limits for this team"
> **RB Leipzig coach, Ralph Hasenhuttl**

"We go for players we think are ready to take the next step in their careers with us," explained Rangnick in an interview with *Kicker* magazine in December.

"You are then talking about another type of motivation. No player signs here principally because of the money."

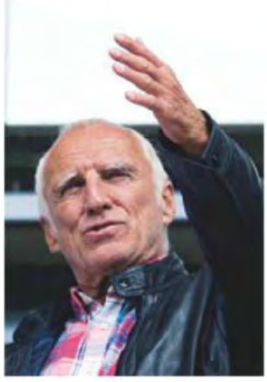
And to their credit Leipzig make very few market-place mistakes. Costing some €40m, all of their big signings of last summer – Keita, Werner, Oliver Burke – have delivered and the club also has benefitted from inside knowledge, boasting no fewer than six ex-employees of Red Bull's other *Mitteleuropa* soccer franchise in Salzburg, including Keita, Peter Gulacsi, Bernardo and Marcel Sabitzer.

Banners...Bayern Munich fans show their dislike for RB

The problem RB have, though, is the cold, calculating image they send out at times. Traditionalists by nature, German fans see the *Roten Bullen* as an over-commercialised outfit without a soul; one which has not paid its dues.

Rangnick might claim his team is gaining more respect in Germany, but on the ground in the Bundesliga – just like it was in the second division last term – the Leipziger continue to face a tidal wave of hostility and hatred. There are

THE POWER CURVE
The key figures at RB Leipzig



DIETRICH MATESCHITZ
Austrian billionaire who founded the Red Bull empire and has set up clubs in Leipzig, Salzburg, New York and in Brazil. Has also enjoyed great success in Formula One motor racing and sponsoring extreme sports.

RALF RANGNICK
Hired in June 2012 as director of sport at both RB Salzburg and Leipzig, the former Stuttgart, Hanover, Schalke and Hoffenheim boss is responsible for their philosophy and strategy. Coached Leipzig to promotion last season.

OLIVER MINTZLAFF
Previously an executive with Puma and Rangnick's agent, he has been with Red Bull for the past three years, initially as Head of Global Soccer, then as chairman and chief executive.

RALPH HASENHUTTL
Austrian coach who works closely with Rangnick. Does not like his reputation as an alpha male, preferring to be seen as a "service provider" to the team.

ZSOLT LOW
Former Hungary left-back who is Hasenhuttl's second-in-command. Spent most of his career in Germany with Energie Cottbus, Hansa Rostock, Hoffenheim and Mainz.

Support...RB Leipzig fans

a proliferation of offensive banners in stadiums, while Dortmund ultras boycotted a trip to Saxony, Cologne fans blocked the path of the RB team bus and Borussia Monchengladbach fans disdainfully staged a silent protest.

To a degree the antipathy has been sparked by envy, the RB goldrush contrasting with the stagnant status of a swathe of grand old clubs such as Hamburg, Werder Bremen, 1860 Munich and Stuttgart. However, it's equally an attack on the old order: the clubs with deep roots in their communities and whose members call the shots.

RB's motto is "*Anders sein*", meaning "be different", and in terms of their identity and ways and means, they certainly live up to it, circumventing German sponsorship rules by craftily baptising themselves RasenBallsports (Turf Ball Sport) Leipzig – thus keeping the Red Bull, RB, moniker front and centre - and appearing to only pay lip service to the German league's "50+1" rule, whereby fans and not corporate interests have the controlling stake in a club.

Strong...Augsburg's Alfred Finnbogason clashes with Marvin Compper (left)

Whereas the majority of the country's professional sides are underpinned by a low-cost and fully engaged mass membership system, Red Bull have done their level best to keep the levers of power in corporate hands. What membership cards they do make available are very expensive indeed – costing anything up to €1,000 euros – and all bar 17 of them come without voting rights. Not exactly football democracy German style.

Whenever they are criticised for being a big business plaything, their stock response is "are we the only ones?" And they do have point.

The German game is as dependent on shirt sponsorship, commercial partners and stadium-naming rights as elsewhere. And the Bundesliga is awash with clubs heavily influenced by the corporate world. Leverkusen and Wolfsburg are run by the Bayer and VW conglomerates respectively, Dortmund are listed on the Stock Exchange, while Audi, Adidas and the Allianz insurance company own chunks of Bayern Munich stock.

Inevitably for a club so young, there remains much more to do in order to become the complete package. Chairman Oliver Mintzlaff estimates that RB only has 80 per cent of the necessary

STADIUM

Red Bull Arena (capacity 42,959)
Located on the site of the city's famous old Zentralstadion – the cavernous 110,000 bowl which used to host East Germany internationals and European games involving Lokomotive Leipzig – the sumptuous all-seater was a new-build for the 2006 World Cup, hosting four group matches and a round-of-16 tie.

Following Red Bull's decision, in 2009, to set up a professional football club in Leipzig, it was an obvious choice of home ground and the club started to play here in the 2010-11 season.

Unhappy at only being tenants, the club considered building a new stadium on the outskirts of town until Red Bull bought the arena from owner Michael Kolmel.

Plans are now afoot to increase capacity by some 15,000.

Pride...the top-of-the-table meeting with Bayern Munich

organisational structures in place, they still have considerable work to do on the youth development front and have plans to increase the capacity of their Red Bull Arena from 42,000 to 57,000.

And it's something of an urban myth that Leipzig have nothing to offer in the way of fan culture. Six of their seven home games this season have been sell-outs, there is a real buzz of sporting expectancy in the city and, in contrast to several other eastern German clubs, they have not been infected by the twin vices of far-right extremism and crowd violence.

Historically, Leipzig is very much a football town. The German federation was founded here, VfB Leipzig were the first national champions, in 1903, and from 1949 to 1990, Lokomotive Leipzig – who were a rebranded version of VfB – were a respected force in Europe, reaching the semi-finals of the UEFA Cup in 1974 and losing to Ajax in the Final of the 1987 European Cup-winners Cup.

Historic...the 1987 European Cup-winners Cup Final against Ajax (right), and the respective captains (below) Locomotive's Frank Baum and Marco Van Basten before kick-off

Following German unification, Lokomotive reclaimed the VfB name and won promotion to the Bundesliga in 1993, but they lasted just a year in the top flight and on being demoted to the third tier in 1998 they gave up the professional ghost, leaving the city a football wasteland for more than a decade.

These days, Leipzig is more or less a one-team town. While RB go from strength to strength, a relaunched Lokomotive now operate in the German fourth tier, while the likes of Chemie and Inter eke out an existence in the fifth.

Hopeful of at least a European qualifying spot at the end of this season, RB are well aware they remain a work in progress on the field of play. In their 3-0 loss at Bayern Munich in the final round of the Autumn Championship, they were second best in all areas. They were naive defensively and totally overrun in midfield.

"We received a lesson in the form of a top performance from Bayern," said Hasenhuttl. "Our system only functions when everything is synchronised with us – and tonight it wasn't the case."

A setback, yes; the end of the line, absolutely not. With their ideas, plans, limitless resources, inspirational decision-makers and squad, RB Leipzig can only go one way: onwards and upwards. WS

THE COACH

Ralph HASENHUTTL
Age 49 (09.08.67)
Capped eight times by Austria, he won league titles in his homeland with Austria Vienna and Austria Salzburg, and played in Belgium (Mechelen and Lierse) and Germany (Cologne, Greuther Furth and Bayern Munich reserves).

On retiring in 1994, he accepted a coaching post with suburban Munich outfit Unterhaching, where for the next half-dozen years he would serve as youth-team boss, first-team assistant and head coach. He then took Aalen up to the second tier before turning Ingolstadt from a relegation-threatened second division side into fully paid-up members of the Bundesliga.

He signed a three-year deal last summer with RB, after being handpicked by Ralf Rangnick.

THE KIT

HOME KIT SECOND KIT THIRD KIT

THE SQUAD

GOALKEEPERS

Fabio COLTORTI (Swi)
Age 36 (03.12.80)
Lost his place to Gulacsi after injuring a shoulder midway through last season. Scored a late winner against Darmstadt in 2015.

Peter GULACSI (Hun)
Age 26 (06.05.90)
Once of Liverpool, he saved three penalties in the play-off as Hungary finished third at the 2009 Under-20 World Cup. In his country's Euro 2016 squad.

Marius MULLER
Age 23 (12.07.93)
Former German under-20 international who was signed from Kaiserslautern last year for €1.7m.

DEFENDERS

BERNARDO (Bra)
Age 21 (14.05.95)
His father, also Bernardo, was capped five times by Brazil in 1989. Has done a good job filling in at right-back for the injured Klostermann.

Marvin COMPPER
Age 31 (14.06.85)
Centre-back who was the first man to be capped at senior level by Germany while with Hoffenheim – where he played under Rangnick.

Dominik FRANKE
Age 18 (05.10.98)
Homegrown left-back who has represented Germany at under-18 and under-19 level. Can also operate as a midfield ball-winner.

Marcel HALSTENBERG
Age 25 (27.09.91)
First-choice left-back following a move from St Pauli. Played for Dortmund reserves under David Wagner, who is now in charge of Huddersfield Town.

Stefan ILSANKER (Aut)
Age 27 (18.05.89)
The son of Red Bull Salzburg's keeper Herbert Ilsanker, he also started out between the posts before becoming a versatile outfield player.

Lukas KLOSTERMANN
Age 20 (03.06.96)
Right-back who won a silver medal at the 2016 Olympics. Played in RB's first Bundesliga game, but absent ever since after injuring a knee in training.

Willi ORBAN
Age 24 (03.11.92)
Ever present last season, the former German under-21's late winner at Leverkusen in November put RB top of the Bundesliga for the first time.

Benno SCHMITZ
Age 22 (17.11.94)
Former Bayern Munich junior, he was capped by Germany at under-20 level and went on to win the Austrian league with Red Bull Salzburg in 2015.

Dayot UPAMECANO (Fra)
Age 18 (27.10.98)
Centre-back signed for €10m from Red Bull Salzburg in the January transfer window. He was a European champion with France's under-17s in 2015.

MIDFIELDERS

Oliver BURKE (Sco)
Age 19 (07.04.97)
Winger who became the most expensive Scot ever when joining Leipzig from Nottingham Forest for £13m in 2016.

Diego DEMME
Age 25 (21.11.91)
Midfield enforcer signed from Paderborn in 2014, his father is from the southern Italy of Calabria and named him after Diego Maradona.

Gino FECHNER
Age 19 (05.09.97)
Defensive midfielder who was lured away from the Bochum academy 18 months ago. Has looked the part when playing for Germany at youth level.

Emil FORSBERG (Swe)
Age 25 (23.10.91)
Swedish international whose form has attracted the interest of Liverpool. Sent off against Bayern Munich, he can play as a second striker or out wide.

Dominik KAISER
Age 28 (16.09.88)
Club captain who scored RB's first-ever Bundesliga goal, in a 2-2 draw against his former club Hoffenheim. No longer an automatic starter.

Zsolt KALMAR (Hun)
Age 21 (09.06.95)
Creative midfielder and full international who captained Hungary's under-19 side. Was on loan at FSV Frankfurt when they were relegated last term.

Naby KEITA (Gui)
Age 21 (10.02.95)
Box-to-box central midfielder who moved to France when he was a teenager. He is only the fifth Guinean ever to play in the Bundesliga.

Rani KHEDIRA
Age 23 (27.01.94)
The younger brother of Sami Khedira, he himself has been capped up to under-19 level. Born in Stuttgart to a German mother and a Tunisian father.

FORWARDS

Terrence BOYD (USA)
Age 25 (16.02.91)
Signed from Rapid Vienna in 2014 but injuries have limited the US international to just seven games and two goals for Leipzig.

Yussuf POULSEN (Den)
Age 22 (15.06.94)
The son of a Tanzanian father and a Danish mother, he is quick and agile but needs to improve his scoring record.

Marcel SABITZER (Aut)
Age 22 (17.03.94)
The son of former Austria striker Herfried Sabitzer, he made his own international debut in 2012 and is a key part of Hasenhuttl's attack.

Davie SELKE
Age 22 (20.01.95)
Signed from Werder Bremen in 2015 for a second-tier record of €8m. Won the Golden Boot as Germany lifted the 2014 Euro Under-19 title.

Timo WERNER
Age 20 (06.03.96)
Cost a then-club record €10m last year, but in the news of late with accusation of diving for a penalty and then injuring a team-mate with a rash tackle.

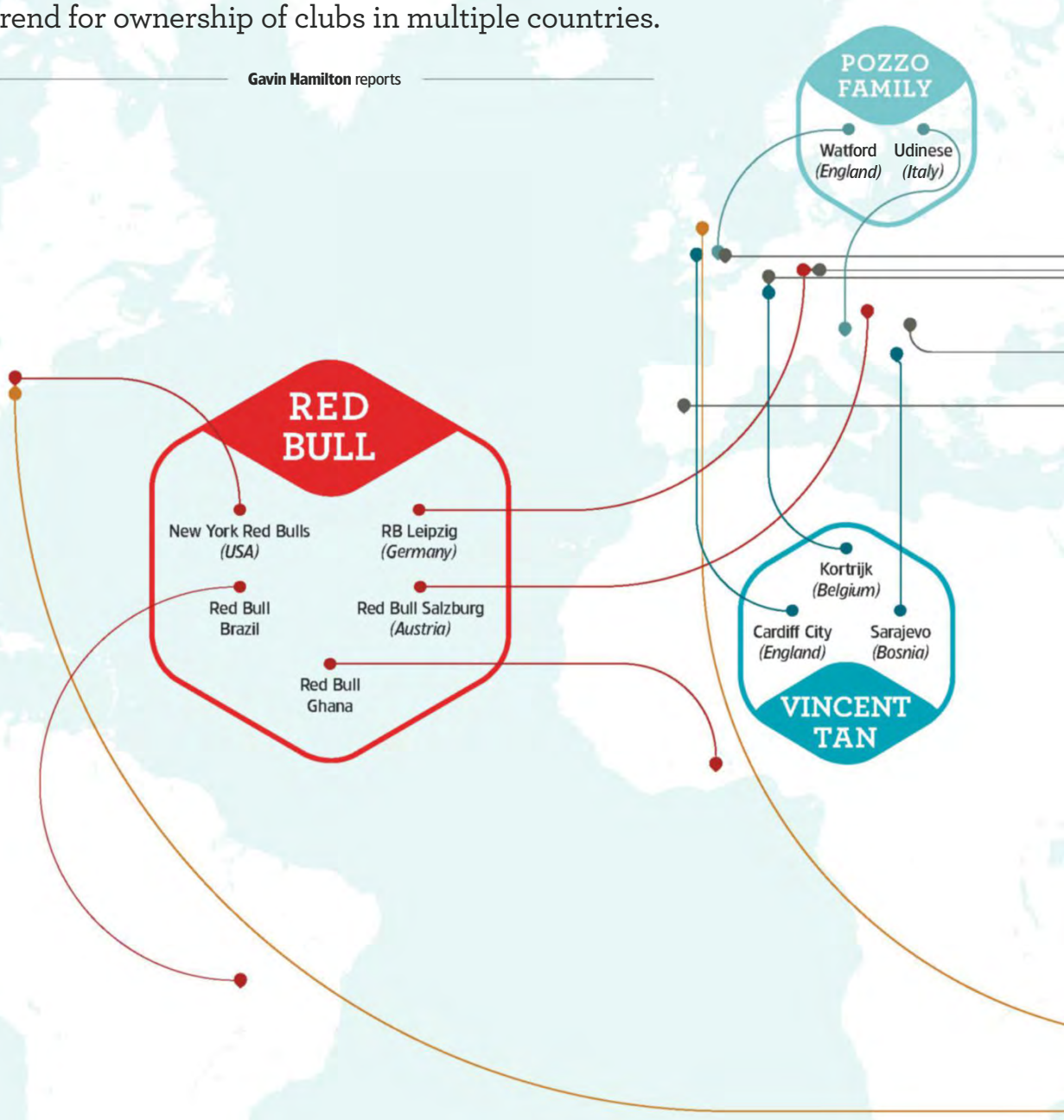
(ages as of 27.01.17)

SPECIAL FEATURE

Going global

Red Bull's involvement with Leipzig is part of a growing trend for ownership of clubs in multiple countries.

Gavin Hamilton reports



In the late 1990's, the activities of the English National Investment Company, known as ENIC and owned by Caribbean-based billionaire speculator Joe Lewis, caused waves across European football and prompted Europe's governing body UEFA to act.

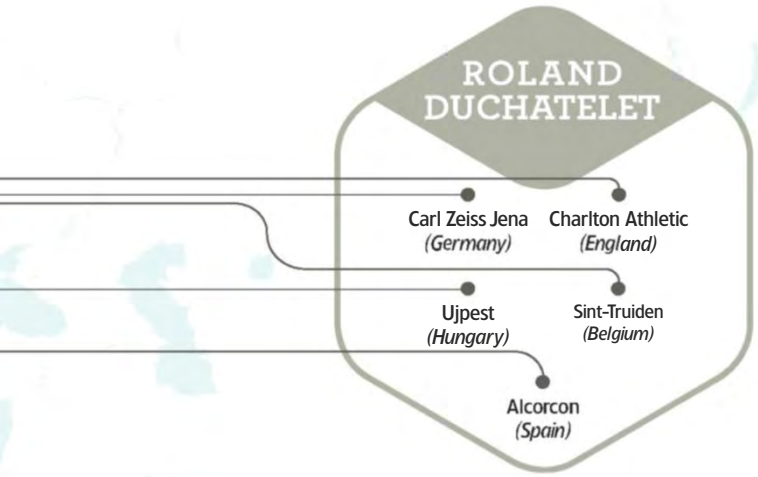
ENIC, who still own Tottenham Hotspur, had an investment strategy that led them to buy stakes in clubs across Europe. At one stage, they were involved at Vicenza, Slavia Prague, AEK Athens and Rangers, in addition to Spurs.

After AEK and Slavia qualified for the same European club competition, UEFA introduced a rule preventing any company having a controlling interest in more than one club. This ruling was backed by the Court of Arbitration for Sport.

ENIC continued with their interest in Spurs but gradually sold their other football interests and the fad for footballing share flotations faded.

Now, almost 20 years later, the issue of multi-club ownership could return to trouble the European game.

UEFA's position remains that if two teams with the same owner are eligible for the same competition, only one can enter. But the emergence of two Red



Bull teams – in Leipzig and Salzburg, both successful in their respective domestic leagues – could see that rule tested again.

Red Bull Salzburg have been regular participants in the qualifying stage of UEFA competitions since being taken over by Red Bull in 2005. However, UEFA refuses to recognise their full name and they have been forced to drop the "Red Bull" moniker and compete in European competitions as FC Salzburg.

Just as ENIC's motivation for investing in clubs was financial, so is Red Bull's. But where ENIC hoped to profit from the stock market flotation of football clubs in the 1990s, Red Bull's involvement is harder to quantify. But, clearly, owner Dietrich

Powerful backing... Manchester City

Mateschitz places enormous value on the high-profile exposure gained by his drinks business through sports sponsorship.

The most global multi-club strategy is being implemented by Manchester City's billionaire owner Sheikh Mansour, with City-branded clubs in leagues in four different continents.

While City's strategy has been clear, the motivation of such businessmen as Vincent Tan and Roland Duchatelet is less clear.

Tan, the Malaysian millionaire who angered Cardiff City fans with his decision to switch the club's colours from blue to red, before switching back to red, has enjoyed success with his investment in Bosnia, and has also ventured into Belgian football with KV Kortrijk. So far, though, there has been little co-operation between Tan's clubs.

In contrast, Duchatelet – the Belgian owner of Sint-Truiden and Hungary's Ujpest as well as lower-tier clubs in England, Germany and Spain – has come under fire at Charlton Athletic, where fan protests have become increasingly vociferous in reaction to the 70-year-old moving staff between his clubs. There have been six managers in three years, as well as the controversial appointment of a CEO, Katrien Meire, a lawyer with no previous experience of football.

Charlton supporters have been encouraged by Duchatalet's sale of Standard Liege, where he was forced out following fan protests. His son has so far avoided similar disruption at Ujpest, albeit while facing lower expectations from fans who have long given up on Ujpest reclaiming past glories.

The Pozzo family, owners of Serie A club Udinese since 1986, can arguably lay claim to have enjoyed the most success from the multi-club model. They bought Spanish club Liga 2 side Granada in 2009 and the then-Championship club Watford in 2012 and moved players between all three clubs. The Pozzos – father Giampaolo and son Gino – sold Granada to a Chinese businessman last summer in order to concentrate on Udinese and Watford.

The Watford side that reached the 2013 Championship play-off Final contained a number of players from Granada and Udinese, as the Pozzos took advantage of a loophole in Football League regulations. Clubs were prevented from loaning more than two players from other English clubs but there were no limits on the number of foreign loans. The EFL has since closed the loophole, but not before Watford had taken advantage and won promotion.

The Watford side that was promoted to the Premier League in 2014 featured Matej Vydra and Odion Ighalo on loan from Udinese as well as Juan Carlos Paredes and Miguel Layun, signed for undisclosed fees from Granada.

The current Watford squad no longer contains any players loaned from Udinese, although Venezuelan teenager Adalberto Penaranda has been moved between all three of the Pozzo family's clubs.

Business has been good for the Pozzos, who are just one of a growing band of football's multi-club owners. WS

Success...Udinese and Watford owner Giampaolo Pozzo

Protests...Roland Duchatelet has angered Charlton fans

It was May 2015 and a river of people dressed in maroon and white was dancing and singing on Marsal Tito Street, the main avenue in the Bosnian capital Sarajevo. FK Sarajevo, one of the city's three top-flight clubs, had just won their first league championship in eight years and tens of thousands had turned up for the victory parade.

But, none of the players were greeted with the same enthusiasm as the small man with a moustache and his FKS shirt tucked high up into his trousers.

"*Amidza*! *Amidza*! *Amidza*!" began the chant as Vincent Tan, who is nicknamed "The uncle" in Bosnia, stepped out on the balcony overlooking the street.

Every single Sarajevo supporter that night was aware that the Malaysian tycoon was the one to thank – not just for the title, but also the fact that their club was still in existence. Before the break-up of Yugoslavia, Sarajevo won two league titles, 1967 and 1983. However, just a couple of years prior to their recent success, they were on the brink of bankruptcy.

At one point Sarajevo's then-manager Mirza Varesanovic held a press conference and explained how it was not possible to

Competitive... Sarajevo's Gojko Cimirot (left) and Nemanja Bilbija

Sarajevo
(Bosnia)

Sarajevo: Tan's Bosnian investment

"Uncle" building his own football family

work with players who have no salaries, place to stay or food to eat. "The only thing they find when they open the fridge is the light bulb," he said.

A couple of months later the supporters trust approached Tan. At the time he was one of the most hated people in British football, having just changed Cardiff City's colours from blue to red. But in Bosnia he was seen as a symbol of success and hope. He stepped in to save Sarajevo, investing an estimated £1.3million to clear their debts and announced investment in the club's academy and the first team.

However, clubs in Bosnia are still run by the same principles as under communism, with private ownership of sports teams not possible under law. Instead, clubs are dependent on their local community and sponsors. But Sarajevo found a formula for Tan to get around the legal boundaries. After investing money to clear the debt, Tan was allowed to install people at the club to make decisions on his behalf.

Belgian club...Tan has bought KV Kortrijk

> "The only thing they find when they open the fridge is the light bulb"
>
> **Former Sarajevo manager Mirza Varesanovic on his player's lack of money for food**

The real question was – and still is – why would Tan be interested in Sarajevo? He may be an odd character, but he wouldn't spend the money for fun. So why would he invest in a club that has no assets, no marketing or any sporting potential in European terms, and plays in the league that attracts average attendances of less than 1,500?

The logical answer is the potential of youth talent in the Balkans. Aware of the talent produced in the region over the past decades, Sarajevo could be used to attract players from all over this part of Europe. The competition for talent is almost non-existent as most of the clubs – apart from Dinamo Zagreb and two Belgrade sides, Partizan and Red Star – are struggling to survive and can't compete with Tan's cash.

Making Sarajevo a feeder club for Cardiff at the time looked like a natural choice, but things have changed since Tan's takeover. He has purchased a third club, Belgian side KV Kortrijk, and invested money in Los Angeles FC – moves which have changed his priorities.

Since solving Sarajevo's debt troubles, most of the money invested by Tan has gone on establishing and improving the youth academy. Besides building a brand new camp on the outskirts of the city, he has created a completely new structure in order to attract the finest local talent to the club. At less than £2.5m, this is a minor investment so far for a man of Tan's wealth and the risk is therefore worth taking, as turning just one talented youngster into Premier league material would probably pay off the entire investment.

However, this all still sounds much better than it looks.

With a mixture of locals and Tan's own assistants, the club are struggling for stability. After Sarajevo won the title in 2015, everyone expected them to dominate the league for years. But they failed to defend the title last season and even missed out on qualifying for Europe.

Since Tan's takeover there have been eight changes of manager and dozens of new players. And, bizarrely, youngsters rarely get a chance to start – their starting XI in the last league game this term before the winter break had an average age of 25.3 years, with only one player under 21 and their best striker being a 31-year-old, Mersudin Ahmetovic.

Sasa Ibrulj

Red Bull: defying tradition to boost the brand

Energy-drinks firm has taste for success

In the end, it all boiled down to the goalkeeper's socks. After pleading unsuccessfully with the club's new owners not to change the team's distinctive purple kit, Austria Salzburg fans were offered one concession: the keeper would wear purple socks for away games.

"For many, that was a provocation which showed that [the owners] had a different type of philosophy which had nothing to do with us," says Austria Salzburg fan Walter Windischauer. "[Their] philosophy does not allow for the fact that football is close to people's hearts."

Furious at their treatment, the fans formed a breakaway club, keeping the Austria Salzburg name, even though it meant starting afresh in the seventh tier. Having risen to the second tier, the team are now back in the third.

Meanwhile, their old club have gone on to win the Austrian title seven times in the last 10 seasons under their new owners, the energy-drink manufacturer Red Bull.

Austria Salzburg represented Red Bull's first venture into the world of football when they bought the club back in 2005; the first block in an empire that at one stage stretched across four continents.

New York MetroStars followed a year later and became New York Red Bulls, and in 2009 they bought German fifth-tier side SSV Markranstadt, who are now RB Leipzig.

In between, they also founded Red Bull Brasil, who compete in the Paulista championship, and Red Bull Ghana.

Influence...Rangnick

Out... Dinamo Zagreb beat Salzburg in the Champions League

Red Bull's involvement is not simply about sticking the company's name on the club shirt, as most corporations do when they get involved, nor do they see it as a rich man's plaything as some individual club owners do. As far as Red Bull is concerned, it is all about branding and marketing, as Austria Salzburg and other supporters quickly found out.

Red Bull has rebranded all the teams and changed their kit to the trademark white shirt with the club emblem stamped in the middle – two red bulls charging at a football. Where possible, the company has attempted to wipe out history. They tried to claim Salzburg were founded in 2005, with owner Dietrich Mateschitz declaring "this is a club with no history" – until the Austrian federation stepped in and ruled the foundation date would remain as 1933.

In terms of titles, there is little disputing that Red Bull's involvement in the sport has been a success. They have dominated the Austrian Bundesliga, leaving traditional powers Rapid Vienna and Austria Vienna

Unloved...Red Bull Salzburg are averaging just 6,000 for home games this season

to eat dust, although curiously they have never achieved their goal of playing in the Champions League group stage.

They have now suffered nine successive failed attempts to qualify and this year's was the most painful as they were three minutes from beating Dinamo Zagreb in their play-off tie until the Croatians equalised and went on to win in extra time.

New York Red Bulls have won the Eastern Conference five times, though they have never won the overall MLS title, while RB Leipzig raced up the German league pyramid, moving from the fifth tier to the top flight in just seven seasons.

Red Bull Brasil, based in the city of Campinas, have enjoyed a comparable run, rising from the fourth tier of the Campeonato Paulista to the top flight since 2009. Unlike the first three teams, they were founded from scratch.

Red Bull Ghana, based in Sogakope, east of Accra, were more set up to provide young players for the three European clubs, although in the end only four players ever went to Salzburg. It was quietly wound up in 2014 and merged with the Feyenoord Academy to form the West African Football Academy.

Red Bull's management style has produced mixed reactions, to put it mildly. "Myself and thousands of Salzburg fans were happy when Red Bull arrived, we thought they could bring in some new players and rescue us from a difficult sporting situation," recalls Windischauer, who went on to become chairman of the new Austria Salzburg.

Red Bull trod more carefully in New York and the initial misgivings of the fans, some of whom continued to wear the MetroStars colours, appeared to be overcome by their relative success and the acquisition of players such as Thierry Henry.

Star...Thierry Henry leads out New York Red Bulls

In Germany, Red Bull is loathed by fans of traditional clubs although it has won support in Leipzig, which admittedly had little to lose having not seen top flight football since 1994. Average home attendances have jumped from just 2,000 in 2012-13 to around 30,000 at present.

The company has also made itself unpopular with the way it has used loopholes in the regulations.

When the German league refused to allow the words "Red Bull" to be included in Leipzig's name, the company decided to call it "RasenBall" instead, which literally means "lawn grass".

Over in Austria, they found a simple solution to the rule which prevented the junior and reserve teams of top-flight clubs from rising above the third tier by founding a new club, FC Liefering. Red Bull insist this is a co-operation agreement, although Liefering play in the corporate colours and the number of transactions with Salzburg clearly indicate that it is little more than a farm team.

With the exception of New York, the teams all share a similar philosophy, based on an aggressive pressing game and quick counter-attacks after they have won possession. Their transfer policy is to sign young players suited to this style rather than splurging on big-name players.

> Red Bull bought Austria Salzburg in 2005: the first block in an empire that at one stage stretched across four continents

Ralf Rangnick, the former Hoffenheim and Schalke coach, has been heavily influential in implementing this strategy since joining as Austria Salzburg's sporting director in 2012. "You can't stop the ball and trap the ball and watch and look and keep the ball again, there is no time for that," he said at the time. "We don't want to create individual players but players who at the age of eight realise that you have to work together with other players."

Even Pep Guardiola was impressed after his Bayern Munich side lost 3-0 to Salzburg in a friendly during the 2013-14 winter break. "I have never seen a team play such high intensity," he said.

Rangnick is one of the few who are prepared to discuss Red Bull's reputation, stating: "Our players have by far the least Bundesliga experience of any team, but everyone is completely hungry, they want to improve and they want to win. Our youngest team has the same philosophy as the senior team. You can see that we follow one path. And if you look at the seven players we brought in for the current season, six are between 19 and 23. This is the profile we are building at the club."

So, if you want your team to climb the league, a Red Bull takeover could be for you. But if you value the club's history and traditions, maybe look elsewhere.

Brian Homewood

City Group: The first global superclub?

Taking things to a whole new level

When former Spain, Barcelona and Atletico Madrid striker David Villa talks about New York City FC, he seldom refers to his team. Instead, he talks of playing for "the group" – City Football Group to be precise, a constellation of football clubs acquired by Manchester City's billionaire owner Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed al Nahyan.

"I had the opportunity of signing for the City Group," Villa said of his arrival in the USA in 2014. "It is not only about one club...City, Melbourne, Japan, maybe more."

And he's right, because Villa isn't just an NYCFC player – he is part of a global cluster of football clubs that have been uniquely assembled by the Emirati prince to create a multi-continental ownership structure that has on the one hand been phenomenally successful at spreading the City brand worldwide, but on the other has raised questions about the power and reach of club owners.

City Football Group was founded in January 2013 as a holding company for its sports properties, owned and operated by the Abu Dhabi United Group. As well as owning 100 per cent of Manchester City and Melbourne City, the group owns 20 per cent of Japanese club Yokohama F Marinos and 80 per cent of NYCFC.

There are also partnerships with clubs and academies across the world, from Ghana to Denmark, with the aim of spreading the City brand on a global stage.

"We have an ambition as a football group to have an organisation that is global and that will have multiple clubs as part of it," chairman Khaldoon Al Mubarak told the club's in-house TV channel, CityTV.

The clubs have been re-branded to fit parent club Manchester City's look and feel. Sometimes sky blue shirts are introduced, sometimes badges are redesigned, and sometimes the name of the club is changed altogether – as happened in 2014 when the group bought Melbourne Heart and controversially changed its name to Melbourne City FC.

Billionaire...city owner Sheikh Mansour

> "When the opportunity arises you can expect us to add to the number of clubs we have already"
> **Khaldoon Al Mubarak**

Business deals have followed, connected to the Abu Dhabi royal family. Manchester City signed a 10-year £400million sponsorship deal with Etihad Airways. Given the huge increase from any previous sponsorship deal – and the fact that the company is effectively run by one of Sheikh Mansour's close relatives, Sheikh Hamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan – the deal caught the attention of UEFA, who suspected that it didn't represent a fair market rate. In the end, UEFA approved the deal, but fined the club a record £49m for its lavish spending.

The globalised commercial deals, alongside booming TV-rights revenue and the shifting of some costly salaries from City on to its group, has helped to make Manchester City profitable – something that seemed impossible a few years ago, given the £1billion-plus spent on transfers

Yokohama F Marinos
(Japan)

Star...Manchester City's Raheem Sterling

Melbourne City
(Australia)

Brand...David Villa

since Sheikh Mansour bought the club from deposed Thai prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra in 2008. Last year City announced they had made a profit for a second year running, netting £20.5m in 2015-16. There was also record-breaking revenue of close to £400m, placing City in the financial elite of world football.

And yet not all is rosy, with controversy surrounding the movement of players between teams within the group. City Football Group have created a network of clubs where players and staff might be interchangeable, potentially circumventing local transfer rules and creating all sorts of potential conflicts of interest.

At the start of 2016 the issue came up in relation to Australian midfielder Anthony Caceres. Manchester City paid Central Coast Mariners A$325,000 for him and then promptly loaned him to Melbourne City. The move incensed Melbourne City's rivals as cash transfers between clubs are banned. The head of Sydney FC, Tony Pignata tweeted: "Caceres to City is wrong. How can FFA allow this? There are no transfers between A-League clubs, yet it seems you can bypass." It left Football Federation Australia scrambling to close the loophole before it happened again.

There is perhaps another issue other than clever financial tricks to keep City and its group afloat and in profit: the homogenisation of global football culture. Mubarak has stated that the four clubs are just the start. "I would say when the opportunity arises – and we are looking at opportunities – you can expect us to add to the number of clubs we have already within the organisation," he told CityTV.

Controversial loan... Melbourne City's Anthony Caceres

The next stop is likely to be China, and the president of the People's Republic of China, Xi Jinping, visited City's training ground in 2015. A few months later, City Football Group sold a 13 per cent stake of the company to China Media Capital and CITIC Capital for close to $400m, valuing the club at an astonishing $3bn.

Big names such as Villa will continue to play an important role in spreading the game, and the group, around the world. Yet some worry what this model will do for indigenous grass-roots football.

"One danger is foreign clubs who see the opportunities in China actually doing something they would never do in their own market: branding locally," says Rowan Simons, author of *Bamboo Goalposts*, a book about football's turbulent history in China. "In the Beijing grass-roots league you'd have Barcelona teams One, Two, Three, where the branding goes all the way down and you won't have any organic teams with their own identity."

The model of borderless super-brand football groups is likely to be replicated elsewhere, given the success so far of City Football Group.

"What a horrible world it would be," says Simons, "if we one day see Barcelona Beijing v Manchester City Beijing."

James Montague

Ujpest: Duchatelet's eastern outpost

Hungarian side run by his son

The furthest point east of Roland Duchatelet's football empire, Ujpest are owned by his 45-year-old son, Roderick. Running underachieving Antwerp club Beerschot until 2010, Duchatelet junior bought a 95 per cent share in the 20-time Hungarian champions in 2011.

Announcing his wish to bring back the glory days of the 1970s, when the club – then called Ujpest Dozsa – won seven straight league titles, Roderick Duchatelet was soon pitched into the turbulent realities of Hungarian football today.

"All the clubs in the league have some state backing," pointed out Gabor Borsche, head of the club's Friends of Ujpest supporters club. "Except for Ujpest. Ferencvaros get a new stadium, Debrecen get a new stadium and Videoton get a new stadium," he complained, indicating the money poured into the domestic game by football-mad prime minister Viktor Orban and his ruling party, Fidesz.

However, Ujpest's Ferenc Szusza Stadium is still undergoing the same modest renovations that have been dragging on since the summer and it remains unclear whether the ground will be ready for the derby game against Ferencvaros in early March.

Football in Hungary must be seen in a different context to how the game is run in the other satellites of the Duchatelet empire. While Ujpest are the most decorated of its constituent five clubs – Duchatelet senior having sold Standard Liege in 2015 – it operates in entirely different circumstances to its partners in England, Germany, Spain and Belgium.

Son...Roderick Duchatelet

Success...Ujpest won the Cup in 2014

Political interference and underhand dealings are commonplace.

In March 2014, Roderick Duchatelet held a quite extraordinary press conference. In the 30 months since his arrival, Ujpest had barely left the relegation zone. Duchatelet also suspected that agents were trying to fleece his club, which was close to bankruptcy and had virtually no revenue coming in. According to Duchatelet, the Hungarian FA was happy to let these agents get away with murder.

For half of his 10-minute conference, Duchatelet broke down in tears as the cameras of the Hungarian press clicked and whirred. It was either a heartfelt plea or an unusual piece of media manipulation. "They have been judging us from day one," he blubbed. "Even criminals get better treatment."

That spring, Ujpest were banned from

High flier...Ujpest's Tibor Nagy in action against MTK Budapest

> "They have been judging us from day one. Even criminals get better treatment"
>
> Roderick Duchatelet

UEFA competitions for three years due to a break in the club's legal status during the three years after the 2011 sale. The club won the Hungarian Cup in 2014, before an impressive crowd of 22,000 at the national stadium under incoming coach Nebojsa Vignjevic, but the ban meant no Europa League place, so no additional TV or advertising revenue.

The silverware was not the least of the Serb's achievements. Having led Vojvodina to within a point of Red Star Belgrade in the 2012-13 Serbian SuperLiga, Vignjevic was in charge of two creditable Ujpest campaigns, in 2014-15 and 2015-16.

Then, in the summer of 2016, as he was preparing his assault on city rivals Ferencvaros, came bombshell news – FIFA banned Ujpest from signing new players during pre-season and in the upcoming winter-break window.

The case involved Colombian left-back Darwin Andrade, who had only played one game for Ujpest but had been shuttled between the Budapest club and former Duchatelet team Standard Liege without being officially registered.

"I think only immediate staff and team members know what kind of problems and challenges we had to face earlier in the summer," said Vignjevic. "Of course, the players were encouraged to leave these problems behind them and perform on the pitch.

Ban...Darwin Andrade

"Before the league started, already there were voices saying that we were already in a relegation fight. It wasn't easy to convince everyone that we really were a good team."

With the previous season's top scorer Mbaye Diagne sold to Tianjin Teda in China, and veteran striker Peter Kabat moving upstairs, Ujpest had a tricky start to the campaign. But even with home games played at nearby Vasas then in provincial Kecskemet, Vignjevic stuck to his task and pulled out four straight wins, followed by an unbeaten 10-game streak up to Christmas. A 3-3 draw at champions Ferencvaros was particularly sweet for the club's long-suffering supporters.

"Young players such as Enis Bardhi and Souleymane Diarra took on a huge burden for the team," explained Vignjevic, praising his Macedonian and Malian international midfielders, who are both 21. "In the light of everything beforehand, I can safely say that we have closed the door on a good autumn campaign."

With eight of those 10 games having been drawn, Ujpest only stand mid-table, but the value of the motivational Vignjevic should not be underestimated. In fact, it was only last winter that Ujpest had to issue an official denial that the Serb would be moving to ailing Charlton Athletic.

Peterjon Cresswell

Glenn Moore

Morgan in shock switch to Lyon

US star makes the move to Europe

When Jean-Michel Aulas began courting Alex Morgan on Twitter he was ridiculed, with one newspaper even suggesting that the sexagenarian president of Lyon was in love with the American striker four decades his junior. But it was Aulus who had the last laugh after pulling off arguably the most audacious transfer in women's football history.

The best-known player in the sport's most successful nation, World Cup winner and Olympic gold medallist Morgan was coming to Europe to play for the Champions League holders.

And while it may only be a loan deal, it is nonetheless highly significant.

For anyone outside the US it's difficult to describe just how high-profile Morgan is. An exciting, attacking player with photogenic looks, a clean-cut lifestyle and more than 70 goals for the national side, she is an advertiser's dream.

Her image has been plastered on huge Times Square billboards, she has appeared in *The Simpsons* and has rung the opening bell at the New York Stock Exchange. Her sponsors include Nike, Coca-Cola, McDonald's, telecommunications giant AT&T and multi-national Proctor & Gamble. Her annual earnings are thought to exceed $2million, she has 3m likes on Facebook and 2.8m followers on Twitter. When the FIFA video game incorporated women players it was her face on the US edition alongside Lionel Messi.

One of the Twitter followers is Aulus, who began his social-media offensive in January 2016. His tweets included images of Lyon's Champions League success splashed over the front page of *L'Equipe*, and OL's beautiful new stadium, which the women's team sometimes play in. Morgan did not appear to respond and – given she and her husband, Servando Carrasco, were playing in the same city, respectively for Orlando Pride and MLS club Orlando City – Aulus' pursuit seemed doomed.

However, the lure of the UEFA Women's Champions League was tempting; so too Aulus' commitment to the women's game. And, crucially, the timing was right. Not only does the US national team have no major tournaments on the horizon, the players, with Morgan to the fore, are embroiled in a pay dispute with US Soccer.

Their collective bargaining agreement (CBA) normally includes a stipend – worth $56,000 last year – to cover players appearing in the National Women's Soccer League (NWSL). However, the CBA has expired, so Morgan appears free to play elsewhere. Lyon are likely to be paying her substantially more than that stipend but, given the value of her endorsements, money is not the motivation.

In a *Player's Tribune* article, Morgan explained it had been a "very difficult" decision but she had been swayed by the opportunity to train daily with world-class players in outstanding facilities. She wrote: "I'm 27, I'm in my prime right now. But my prime isn't going to last forever.

"I have big goals. I want to be the best player in the United States...the best player in the world. I've decided to take a huge risk and bet on myself...in order to become the very best soccer player I can be."

Morgan made the point she would have to train well simply to get into the team. While it would be bold of Gerard Precheur to omit her given the president's personal role in her arrival, Morgan will compete with a glittering cast that includes UEFA player of the year Ada Hegerberg and French internationals Eugenie Le Sommer, Claire Lavogez and Elodie Thomis.

Morgan, whose arrival was well documented on social media by OL, will play with Lyon to the end of the French season, which is expected to culminate in a Champions League Final in Cardiff on June 1. That will rule her out of at least two months of Pride's campaign, plus pre-season planning. Pride, who earlier announced the signing of US defender Ali Krieger from Washington Spirit, said they were "disappointed" Morgan would not be available until mid-summer.

Europe calling...Alex Morgan has moved to Lyon on loan

New goal...Crystal Dunn (in red) is leaving Washington Spirit and joining Chelsea

And Morgan is not the only American international crossing the Atlantic.

In another dramatic transfer Crystal Dunn, the NWSL's 2015 MVP and Golden Boot winner, joined Chelsea, in her case on a permanent deal. The 24-year-old also scored both Washington Spirit's goals when they lost the 2016 NWSL championship Final. As with Morgan and Lyon, part of the attraction appears to have been the level of integration between the men's and women's clubs at Stamford Bridge. Like Morgan, Dunn also referenced the Champions League.

In some respects, Dunn's deal is more notable than Morgan's as it is rare for a leading US player to move to Europe on a long-term basis, and it is also a coup for England's WSL. Dunn has signed to 2019 and confirmed she will not return to play on loan for Spirit this summer despite Chelsea, thanks to the WSL's switch to a winter season, having few meaningful fixtures before September.

Two Canadians are also heading to Europe. Ashley Lawrence and Kadeisha Buchanan, who have been team-mates for clubs and country since they were nine,

both made the move to France rather than sign up for the NWSL draft. They will, however, finally be on opposing sides, with Lawrence joining Paris Saint-Germain and Buchanan another Lyon recruit. Aulus also signed German defender Josephine Henning from Arsenal, while in a busy transfer window a third French club, Montpellier, picked up talented young Swede striker Stina Blackstenius from Linkoping and Belgian international Janice Cayman from NWSL champions Western New York Flash.

Cayman is unlikely to be the last significant departure from Flash. In the NWSL's first example of the north American penchant for re-locating sport teams, it was revealed the franchise was moving more than 500 miles to Raleigh, North Carolina. The team, to be renamed North Carolina Courage in recognition of a previous women's club, will be part of North Carolina FC, itself a rebranding from NASL men's club Carolina Railhawks.

Despite success on the pitch, Flash – who were based in Buffalo but played at Rochester – struggled to attract gates above 4,000 and the owners had been looking to sell for some time.

The squad, which includes New Zealand captain Abby Erceg, Canadian goalkeeper Sabrina D'Angelo, England's Lianne Sanderson and US internationals Sam Mewis, Lynn Williams and Jessica McDonald, will transfer en masse, though it remains to be seen how many of those players accept the move. WS

Transfer...Janice Cayman of Belgium is off to Montpellier

Round-up

Continental champions... Sportivo Limpeno

▼PARAGUAYANS WIN COPA

Sportivo Limpeno, from Paraguay, won the Women's Copa Libertadores with a dramatic victory over Estudiantes de Guarico from Venezuela. Held over a fortnight in Uruguay, the eighth edition of the competition concluded in the first Final without Brazilian involvement. Having not conceded in more than seven hours' play, Estudiantes seemed the likely winners as they led with 19 minutes left, but debutants Limpeno levelled before a last-minute winner from Damia Cortaza.

▼DUTCH FIRE COACH

With barely six months to go before they host Euro 2017, Holland dismissed coach Arjan Van der Laan. Federation technical director Hans Van Breukelen, the former Nottingham Forest and PSV goalkeeper, said: "We don't have enough confidence that he is the right person to guide the team well in the final stage." Assistant coach Sarina Wiegman replaced Van der Laan on an interim basis.

Norway, who Holland host in the tournament's opening game, have also made a change with Martin Sjogren becoming their third coach in as many years. The 39-year-old moves from Linkoping, who he has just steered to the title in his native Sweden.

Gone...Arjan Van der Laan

Top two...Atletico Madrid (in red) and Barcelona

▼ERROR COSTS PSG LEAD

Lyon suffered their first league defeat in nearly three years when Paris Saint-Germain won 1-0 to go into the winter break as league leaders, three points ahead of OL. However, before the league resumed, PSG were fined four points for fielding an ineligible player earlier in the campaign and Lyon thus regained top spot ahead of Montpellier on goal difference.

▼EURO LEAGUES

In Germany, Turbine Potsdam reached the break five points clear of holders Bayern Munich. Atletico Madrid were the mid-point leaders in Spain, a point ahead of Barcelona who they beat in front of 13,935 at Vicente Calderon. Fiorentina, who this season became the first Italian club fully integrated with the men's section, reached the break three points in front of Brescia.

▼LLOYD DOUBLES UP

Carli Lloyd retained her women's player of the year crown at the FIFA awards, despite the USA being knocked out of the Olympics at the quarter-final stage and her club, Houston Dash, failing to make the NWSL play-offs. Melanie Behringer, who was top scorer as Germany won Olympic gold, was runner-up, while her international boss Sylvia Neid was coach of the year.

TOMORROW'S STARS TODAY

Talentscout

MAJOR LEAGUE SOCCER

WORDS: Nick Bidwell

Jack HARRISON

Age 20 (20.11.96), New York City (USA) & England

In a sentence
A former pupil at the Manchester United academy, he enjoyed a memorable first season in MLS, turning heads with his confident performances and not looking out of place in a New York City side containing such global stars as Andrea Pirlo, David Villa and Frank Lampard.

What they say
Ray Selvadurai, one of his coaches at Manhattan Soccer Club: "What sets him apart is the ability to do anything at top speed with precision and accuracy."

Claudio Reyna, New York City sporting director: "We were very excited to get him. We didn't simply see him as one for the future. The feeling we had was that he could make a contribution right away in attack. He's a fantastic kid and an excellent player."

New York City coach, Patrick Vieira: "He's a modern winger. He can come inside, hug the touchline, he can score goals and he's really good in one-on-one situations."

> "He's a modern winger. He can come inside, hug the touchline, he can score goals"
> Patrick Vieira, New York City coach

The story so far
Born in the Staffordshire city of Stoke-on-Trent but raised in the old Lancashire mill town of Bolton, he spent seven years in Manchester United's junior ranks. However mum Debbie, convinced her son would have a better chance of combining sport and education in the USA, encouraged him to make tracks Stateside. At the age of 14 he took up a soccer scholarship at Berkshire School in Massachusetts. Within a year he was voted the best high-school player in the country and – following starring roles at the NYCFC affiliate Manhattan Sports Club and Wake Forest university – he soon had MLS outfits queuing around the block. Chicago Fire chose him with the first pick of the 2016 SuperDraft but he was eventually traded to New York City. He missed the first three months of his inaugural MLS season with a pelvic injury, but was a regular starter by June. On the nomination shortlist for 2016 Rookie of the Year, he lost out to Seattle Sounders striker Jordan Morris.

Play-offs..MLS semi-final against Toronto

The next step
A move to the Premier League is bound to be on the agenda, but that's at least two or three years away. NYCFC have close ties to Manchester City, so it could result in some soul-searching.

Strengths
Has the ability to stretch the play with his energy and acceleration. Nimble on the ball, he is shrewd in his decision-making and appears willing to learn.

Weaknesses
Can be prone to giving the ball away too cheaply and also needs to sharpen up his defensive work.

3 THINGS YOU DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT HARRISON

- Before starting at the Manchester United academy he trained with Liverpool.
- His contemporaries at United included Marcus Rashford, Cameron Borthwick-Jackson and James Wilson.
- In his one and only season at Wake Forest University, he was voted All-American Attacking Player of the Year and Freshman of the Year.

Julian BUSCHER

Midfielder, age 33 (22.04.93) DC United & Germany
Good enough to play for Germany's under-16 and under-18 sides, he offers technical prowess and tempo-setting capability as either a playmaker or box-to-box runner. Featured in the German third tier for Preussen Munster.

Jonathan CAMPBELL

Defender, age 23 (27.06.93), Chicago Fire & USA
A centre-back of considerable poise and athleticism, the business-administration graduate has become a rock at the heart of the Fire back-line.

Justen GLAD

Defender, age 19 (28.02.97), Real Salt Lake & USA
Centre-back who is thought by many to be on the cusp of a call-up to the senior USA set-up. Not exactly a muscular powerhouse, but compensates with his powers of anticipation.

Cristian HIGUITA

Midfielder, age 22 (12.01.94), Orlando City & Colombia
Midfield enforcer whose fierce competitive spirit and intelligent distribution has caught the eye of a number of European scouts. Joined Orlando from Deportivo Cali in 2015.

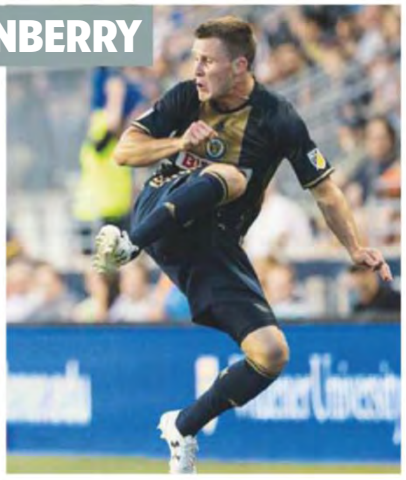
Fabian HERBERS

Midfielder, age 23 (17.08.93), Philadelphia Union & Germany
In his first season as a professional he managed to impress whether playing as a lone striker or on the right wing, posing no end of problems to opposition defenders with his physicality, deft touch and creativity. From the lower Rhine region, close to the Dutch border, he spent the bulk of his formative years training for top Eredivisie club Twente.

Tsubasa ENDOH

Midfielder, age 23 (20.08.93), Toronto & Japan
During the early part of the 2016 MLS campaign the first-round draft selection out of the University of Maryland was lively, fearless and especially dangerous when attacking space. However, he lost his way somewhat as the season progressed and was a little disorientated after coach Greg Vanney switched to a 3-5-2 formation.

Keegan ROSENBERRY



Defender, age 23 (11.12.93), Philadelphia Union & USA
Thoroughbred right-back who was named runner-up in the 2016 Rookie of the Year poll. The Pennsylvanian native had an exemplary year, proving himself to be a fine reader of the game, an extremely clean tackler – only committing 12 fouls during the entire regular season – and enterprising when going forward. Ever present, he was on the pitch for all 3,060 regular season minutes.

Alex MUYL

Midfielder, age 21 (30.09.95), New York Red Bulls & USA
A bundle of boundless energy on the right-side of midfield, he is full of hustle and bustle, commitment and persistence. Arguably the key man in his side's pressing game, he came through Red Bulls' academy then starred for Georgetown University. Attributes his love of the game to his French father and their annual trips to Europe as a child.

World Soccer vintage 24 years ago

February 1993

Real problems in Spain for mighty Madrid

New Blackburn Rovers signing Alan Shearer was the cover star of *World Soccer*'s February 1993 edition and he featured inside in a report on the revival of the once-famous Lancastrian club. The season's big ongoing story, however, was the fall from grace of Real Madrid in Spain.

The Sunday Telegraph's annual survey of Europe's top 40 clubs had stated that "Real's placing [of eighth] is almost entirely due to their historical record, large crowds and some good performances in this season's UEFA Cup".

And as Graham Turner pointed out: "The phrase neatly summarises the sense of sadness felt by outsiders as one of Europe's vintage clubs toil to find a route out of deep crisis."

He suggested that "the fans who recently waved white handkerchiefs in the Bernabeu stadium, as a protest against wretched performances, would even contest the value of UEFA Cup wins over Politehnica Timisoara, Torpedo Moscow and Vitesse of Arnhem".

Turner explained: "Barcelona followers remark with a glint in their eye that an important role reversal has taken place within Spanish football. Real are now exhibiting the symptoms of instability traditionally endemic to Barca.

"President Ramon Mendoza, after rejoicing in five consecutive league titles, is now struggling to keep the ship on an even keel and talking of abandoning it altogether."

The hiring and firing of coaches by Mendoza seemed to add to Real's financial problems.

"Since John Toshack's dismissal in 1991, he has handed the baton to Alfredo Di Stefano, Raddy Antic, Leo Beenhakker and Benito Floro," continued Turner.

"If Floro is still conducting, it is largely because Real do not have the cash to pay him off and hire another top coach.

"The till is so empty that Real could not compete for Rai, Sao Paulo's South American Footballer of the Year, who is going to Paris Saint-Germain."

Turner also highlighted the problems on the pitch. Real had lost the previous season's Liga title to arch-rivals Barcelona in the final 20 minutes of the last game of the season and were fairing little better in the current campaign.

"With Floro complaining bitterly about 'excessive pressures', Real seem to be playing with a mouthful of bile," he wrote.

"They have simply stopped enjoying their football – none more so than Butragueno, Michel, Sanchis and the repatriated Martin Vazquez, whose talents have been eroded by a decade of frontline warfare."

The coach may have been insisting that, although recent performances were poor, the club was "still there or thereabouts", but as Turner concluded: "Unfortunately, at a club of Real's pedigree, 'thereabouts' is not good enough. Especially when Barcelona are winning." WS

Struggle...Real's Ivan Zamorano tries to get past Ronald Koeman of Barcelona

> **"Real Madrid are exhibiting the symptoms of instability traditionally endemic to Barcelona"**

Unhappy...Michel

Newcomer... Robert Prosinecki

Also in this issue...

p9
Graham Turner profiled the 22-year-old Pep Guardiola and suggested he was destined for big things. "Josep Guardiola failed to gain a single point in the voting for the European Footballer of the Year, but nobody can better his haul for 1992," he wrote. "The Spanish title, the [European] Champion's Cup, an Olympic gold medal won in his own stadium during the Barcelona Games and the award for Europe's most promising youngster all went to the Barcelona midfielder."

p14
Salvatore "Toto" Schillaci, who three years earlier came from virtual anonymity to be the leading scorer at the Italia 90 World Cup, was put in the spotlight by Paddy Agnew, who pointed out: "Schillaci no longer wears the black and white of his beloved Juventus and has not represented Italy for more than a year. Only a glut of goals with Internazionale will give him a further opportunity on the international stage. 'I miss playing for the national team very much,' he says. 'But at 28 I don't believe I'm finished. I still run like a madman!'"

p34-35
Blackburn Rovers' return to the top flight in England, in the first season of the newly formed Premier League, was being bankrolled by millionaire Jack Walker and masterminded by manager Kenny Dalglish. One of their new signings, Alan Shearer, as Keir Radnedge commented, "scored 15 goals in his first 13 league appearances this season, but his overall play was just as impressive".

p48
Boca Juniors were celebrating their first title – or "half-title" win, as Eric Weil suggested – for 11 years as they claimed the Apertura crown. Weil described the Boca side as "the poorest title-winning line-up in memory".

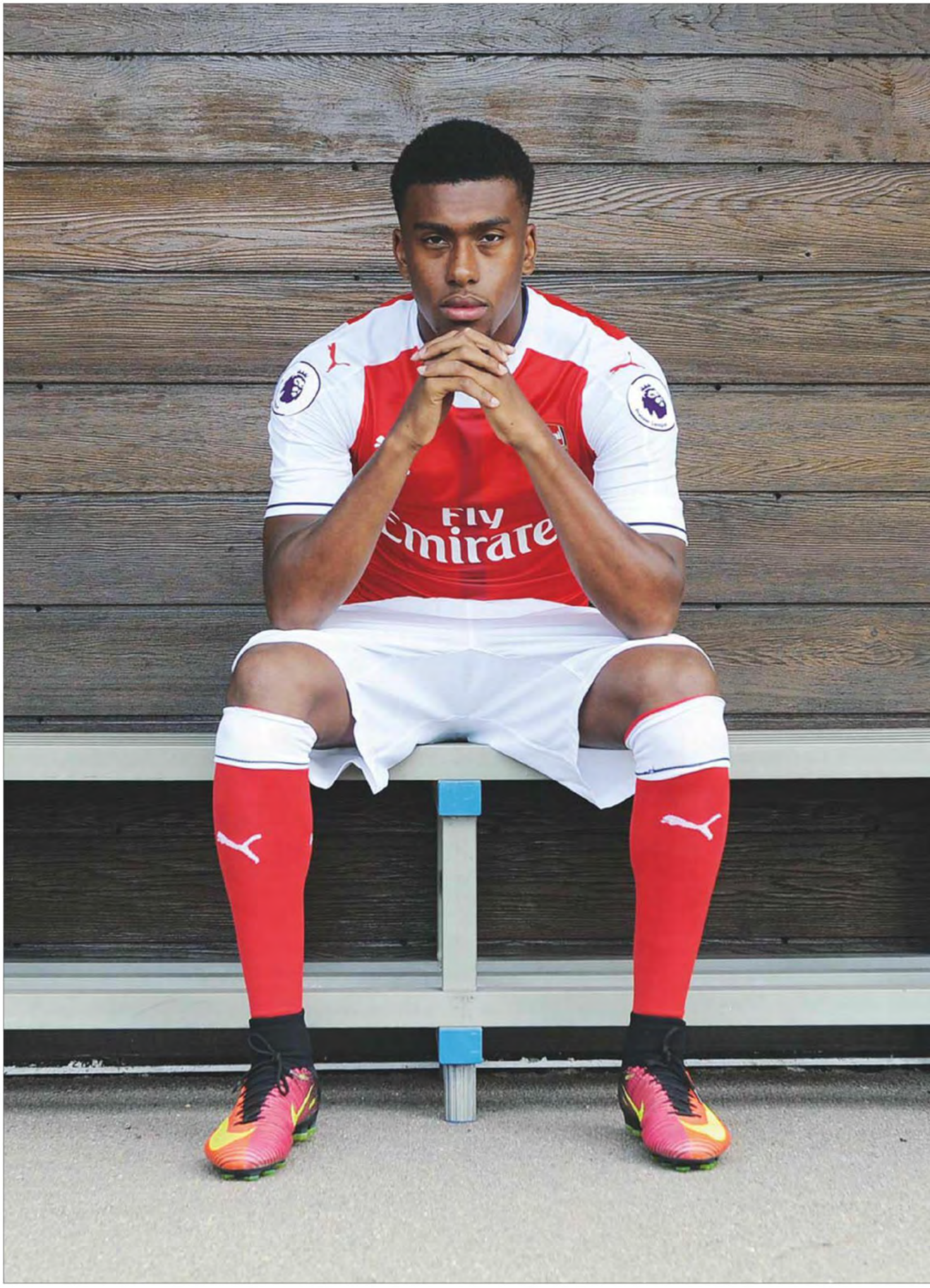
10 years ago
Sevilla coach Juande Ramos is stretchered away after being struck on the head by a missile during a Spanish Cup tie against city rivals Real Betis in their Ruiz de Lopera stadium and the match is abandoned.

20 years ago
Mid-table Milan, who only seven years earlier won back-to-back European Cups, find their nightmare season in Serie A continuing as they lose 1-0 to Perugia. Paolo Maldini and Christophe Dugarry are sent off, while Edgar Davids breaks a leg.

30 years ago
Barcelona forward Gary Lineker scores all four of England's goals as they beat Spain 4-2 in a friendly international at the Santiago Bernabeu – which just happens to be the home of his club side's great rivals, Real Madrid.

40 years ago
Argentina beat Hungary 5-1 at the Bombonera in a game that marks the international debut of 16-year old Diego Maradona. The Argentinos Juniors' midfielder replaces Leopoldo Luque, who scored twice, in the second half.

50 years ago
England captain Bobby Moore, accompanied by his wife Tina, is at Buckingham Palace to collect an OBE, which was awarded to him following the World Cup Final victory over West Germany the previous summer.


Fly
Emirates

Facetoface

ALEX IWOBI

"Wenger's patience makes him a special manager"

The 20-year-old, who was recently voted Africa's Young Player of the Year, talks about his team-mates, Nigeria's World Cup hopes and life at Arsenal

Arsenal lost their opening game of the season, to Liverpool, but are flying again. What's the secret behind the turnaround?
There's really no secret, we are just buzzing. Everyone is playing and training well. Everyone is happy, we are all confident. I think when you have confidence you are always going to do well in your matches and that's what is going well for us.

As a young player you are faced with the pressure of improving on your first season. How tough has that been for you this term?
Unfortunately I picked up an injury on the opening day of the season so I had my doubts if I was going to ever get back into the team, but the manager showed his faith in me. When you are training with world-class players they help you and always give you advice on the pitch, as well as off the pitch. So I guess playing with them makes it easier for me.

Arsene Wenger has now been Arsenal's manager for 20 years and, as one of the club's academy products, you weren't even born when he took over. Is he like a father figure to you?
[Loud laughter] Well, I guess with the football ties...yes, he's like a father to me, so that's true. To be brought up under Arsene Wenger, I am happy for myself. I feel like I've achieved one of my dreams, to play for Arsenal, one of the biggest teams in the world, and for a manager such as Wenger, who's managed great players like Thierry Henry, Dennis Bergkamp.

Competition...with Arsenal team-mate Theo Walcott

He's been called the professor, a philosopher – even a miser for not spending money. What is it about Arsene Wenger that makes him so special as a manager?
For me, I believe it's the patience that he has in him. He's always patient, bringing through young talents; patience with how he plays football, building up, a passing game. Everything he does he's just patient.

Your childhood pal Chuba Akpom is also in Arsenal's first-team plans this season. You must be excited for him...
I've played with Chuba since the age of six, when we both played for our local team [Rippleway under-6s] and it's always been our dream to play for Arsenal. So when we got the chance of playing with Arsenal we were both excited going through the ranks, to be where we are today. We didn't expect it, but we are just grateful for the opportunity we have.

You changed your squad number at the start of the season. Your dad suggested you loved the number 45 and now you are 17. Were you disappointed by the change?
Unfortunately I didn't really have a decision with the number change as 45 is a youth number and the kit man said I'd need to change my number because I was getting into the first team more, so I'd need to get a lower number. He gave me the option, so I figured since Alexis [Sanchez] was moving to number seven, I picked that and I'd like to start my own legacy with number 17.

You're now an established member of the first-team squad. Does having a lower number come with an added pressure?
Not at all. You are not normally judged by the number on the back, you're judged by how you performed on the pitch. I would like to show myself by how I perform on the pitch rather than the number or the vague impression that I am now playing in the first team.

What's the mood like in the team? Do you think this could be Arsenal's season to win the title after finishing second last time out?
We are all buzzing and we all believe that we can do extremely well this season with our performances and the way we are playing so far. Do we think about the title? Why not? We missed out narrowly last season. But, to be honest, we don't normally look that far ahead. We normally take it one step at a time, one game at a time,

and try to focus on the next game and hopefully to get the three points.

Whenever Arsenal lose there are calls from the fans asking for the manager to leave. What do you make of that?
I say to people that if you've seen what he's achieved I don't understand why you'd be saying something like that. Why say such a thing when he's such a great manager? He brings through a lot of talent. He's done great things in the past. The main thing for me to say to Arsenal fans is just be patient and we will win trophies. It's just a matter of time; we will get trophies for the fans.

People are suggesting that you are keeping Theo Walcott out of the team, but he's had a great start to the season and you are also playing as well...
I don't know, it's not up to me. At the end of the day, it's up to the manager. He has the quality to play – as you see already this season he's scored amazing goals and created a few assists. I can see he's a key player for us this season, so for people to say such things, I don't really believe in it.

Who is your closest friend at the club, apart from your childhood pal Chuba Akpom?
Apart from Chuba, I mingle with a lot of different people, mostly the young guys. Jeff Reine-Adelaide and I are close because we train together. I also talk with the English boys because we know each other well. I get on with foreign lads like Mohamed Elneny – who is still talking about Egypt knocking us out of the Nations Cup. I have to take his banter on the chin and move on.

You were looking forward to your first African Nations Cup and Olympics, but it didn't happen. How important is it now for Nigeria to reach the World Cup in Russia?
We are such a big country and we believe we can do well. Unfortunately we lost to Egypt and will miss the AFCON. To qualify for the World Cup is the biggest tournament every country and player would love to be in – and we would love to be involved in.

You've seen the likes of Arsenal team-mate Alexis Sanchez go to the World Cup. Does that give you extra motivation to want to play in the tournament as well?
For me, at such a young age, to even play for my national team I'm still amazed. So to even make it to the World Cup would just be a great feeling to play against world-class players.

Legend...former Nigeria and Bolton star Jay-Jay Ochoa

What was it like scoring your first goal in international football, in Nigeria's 2-1 win against Zambia?
It is an honour playing for a big footballing nation like Nigeria. I can't describe the feeling of elation when I scored the goal against Zambia. I am glad that Kelechi Iheanacho scored a wonderful goal as well as he is a remarkable talent. However, it's all about the team and I am glad we all played well and got a victory against a very good Zambian team.

How did it feel when Mesut Ozil compared you to your uncle Jay-Jay Okocha?
It's an unbelievable feeling being compared to a legend like Jay-Jay Okocha. My uncle has been a great influence in my career and was instrumental in my pledging my allegiance to Nigeria from England. There are similarities in how we both play, but I am my own person and I'm working very hard to establish my own identity. When my playing days are over I would love to be identified as a player in my own right.

Deep down, do you think you are similar to your uncle in any way?
We have a similar style of play, but our greatest similarity is we love the game of football and we both come from a humble background. We both recognise the importance of humility and respect to coaches, fans, team-mates and opponents.

> "The main thing for me to say to Arsenal fans is just be patient and we will win trophies. It's just a matter of time"

Talking of uncles, Paul Pogba used to call Patrice Evra "Uncle Pat" when they played together at Juventus. At the age of 20, do you refer to anyone as an "uncle" in the Arsenal squad?
We are one family in Arsenal but I do not refer to anyone as "uncle". I am one of the young players in the Arsenal first-team dressing room but the philosophy is "if you are good enough then you are old enough". The older players always offer support to the younger ones and I have found this very helpful. Being Nigerian, however, I do not call my daddy's friends by name but refer to them as "uncle" as this is the accepted Nigerian etiquette.

Interview by Oluwashina Okeleji

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GROUNDHOPPING

No place like home

From international stadia to non-league pitches, we take a look at some of the world's most idyllic settings for football

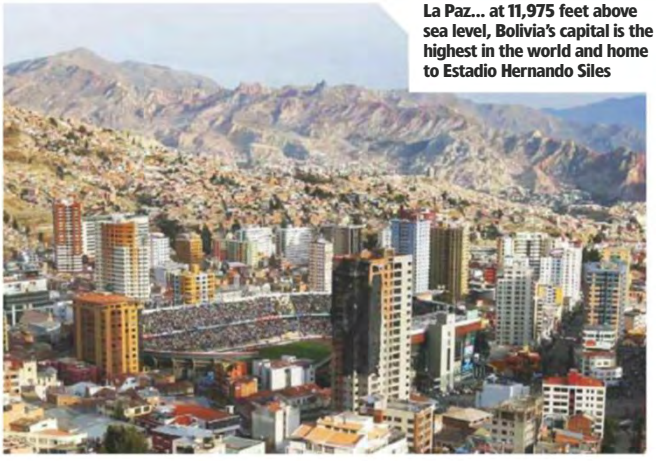
Rijeka...HNK Rijeka's Stadion Kantrida in Croatia overlooks the Adriatic Sea and is currently being redeveloped

Imotski...further south in Croatia is NK Imotski's Stadion Gospin dolac, which is located under the rocks along the Blue Lake and next to the old fortress of Topana

Tromso...the Alfheim Stadion in Norway is the most northerly stadium to have hosted European football

NEW

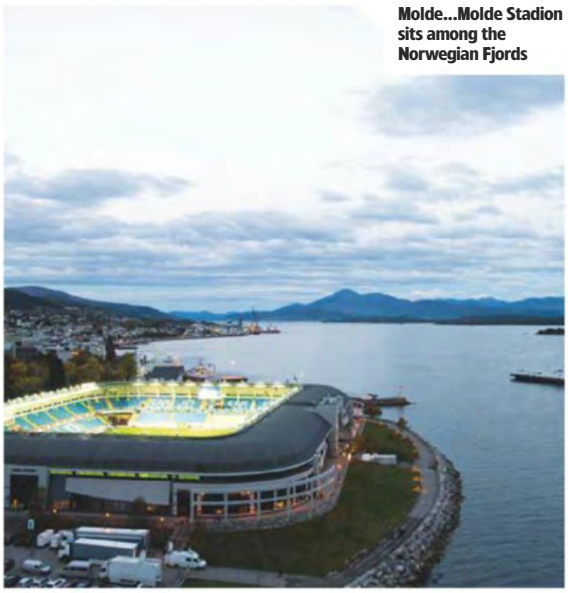
Pennsylvania... Philadelphia Union's Talen Energy Stadium lies in the shadow of the Commodore Barry Bridge, across the Delaware River



La Paz... at 11,975 feet above sea level, Bolivia's capital is the highest in the world and home to Estadio Hernando Siles

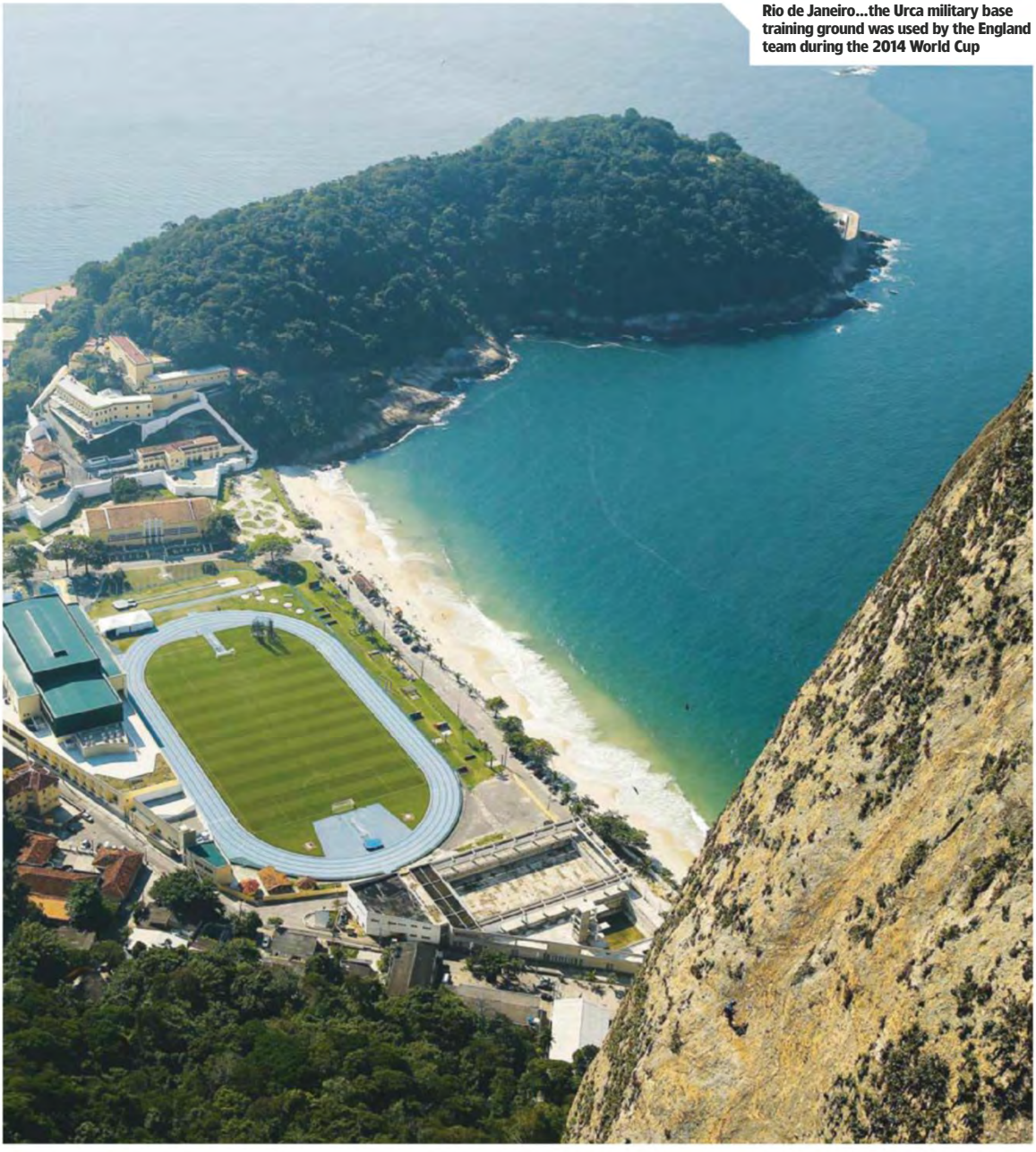
Andorra la Vella... the Estadi Comunal d'Andorra la Vella

San Justo...fifth-tier Club Social y Deportivo Liniers' have been playing on their crooked pitch on the outskirts of Buenos Aires for nearly 30 years



Molde...Molde Stadion sits among the Norwegian Fjords

Rio de Janeiro...the Urca military base training ground was used by the England team during the 2014 World Cup



Eidi..in the north of the Faroe Islands, the Eidi Stadium stands on the edge of the north Atlantic Ocean

Toftir...the Faroe Islands still host internationals at the Svangaskard stadium

Gosford...A-League side Central Coast Mariners play at the picturesque Central Coast Stadium on the edge of the South Pacific

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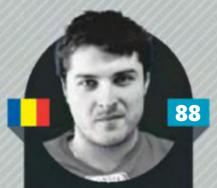

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DR Congo

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The future...South American Under-20 Championship

INTERNATIONAL & CLUB FOOTBALL

92 Results, tables, fixtures

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Club World Cup... Real Madrid beat Kashima Antlers in the Final

85

TP Mazembe...Confederations Cup winners

DECEMBER 16, 2016-JANUARY 18, 2017

Global diary

A comprehensive record of recent events around the world

Friday December 16

GERMANY: Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang scores his 100th goal for Borussia Dortmund as they draw 2-2 at Hoffenheim, despite having Marco Reus sent off.

Saturday December 17

AUSTRALIA: Melbourne Victory come from behind to win 2-1 against Melbourne City in the derby game at AAMI Park.
SPAIN: Sevilla score four times in 11 minutes to beat Malaga 4-1 and go second in La Liga.
THAILAND: Overturning a 2-1 away-leg deficit, holders Thailand beat Indonesia 2-0 in the return to win the AFF Championship for a record fifth time.

Sunday December 18

EL SALVADOR: Former Uruguay international Sebastian Abreu scores twice in the last 12 minutes as Santa Tecla beat Alianza 3-2 to win the Apertura Final.
HOLLAND: Ajax and PSV draw 1-1 to leave Feyenoord with a five-point lead at the summit.
HONDURAS: Montagua draw 1-1 at home to Platense and win the Apertura Final 2-1 on aggregate to claim a 14th Honduran league title.
SPAIN: Cristiano Ronaldo gets a hat-trick as Real Madrid beat Kashima Antlers 4-2 in extra time to win the Club World Cup. Scoring twice in Barcelona's 4-1 win over local rivals Espanyol, Lionel Messi becomes the record scorer in the Catalan derby with 15 goals.

Monday December 19

ENGLAND: A goal from Sadio Mane in the fourth minute of injury time gives Liverpool at 1-0 victory at Everton in the Merseyside derby.
FIFA: England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales are all fined for displaying poppies during World Cup qualifiers in November.
RUSSIA: Emails released by a World Anti-Doping Agency investigation claim there were five suspicious test samples in Russia's under-17 and under-21 teams in 2013 and 2014.

Tuesday December 20

GERMANY: Dynamo Dresden defender Marc Wachs is shot in an incident in Wiesbaden that leaves a family member dead and another seriously injured. Borussia Dortmund draw 1-1 with Augsburg and end the year with an unbeaten home record in the Bundesliga.
SPAIN: Real Madrid have their two-window transfer ban reduced to one by the Court of Arbitration for Sport.

Wednesday December 21

FRANCE: Mario Balotelli and Younes Belhanda are sent off in injury time as Nice draw 0-0 at Bordeaux.
GERMANY: Bayern Munich open up a three-point lead over RB Leipzig at the top of the table after they beat them 3-0. Following Tuesday's 2-1 loss at home to Wolfsburg, Borussia Monchengladbach part company with coach Andre Schubert.

Heated...Bordeaux (in blue) and Nice

Thursday December 22

ENGLAND: Crystal Palace sack manager Alan Pardew with the club 17th in the Premier League after a run of one win in 11 games.
GERMANY: Dieter Hecking is named Borussia Monchengladbach coach and signs a contract that runs until June 2019.
ITALY: Genoa's Pietro Pellegri equals the record for the youngest player to appear in Serie A as he comes on as a sub, at the age of 15 years and 280 days, in a 1-0 defeat at Torino.
MEXICO: Tigres draw 1-1 away to Club America in the first leg of the Liga MX Apertura Final.
ROMANIA: A court rules that Steaua Bucharest have been illegally using the name which rightfully belongs to the army side. Steaua split from the state sports club, CSA Steaua Bucharest, in 1998.
SOUTH AFRICA: National coach Shakes Mashaba is sacked at a disciplinary hearing following an outburst in which he took aim at SAFA president Danny Jordaan in the wake of a 2-1 World Cup qualifying win over Senegal in November.

Friday December 23

ENGLAND: Crystal Palace appoint former England boss Sam Allardyce as manager. Chelsea confirm Oscar will join Shanghai SIPG of China for a reported fee of £60m.
ITALY: Gianluigi Buffon's 600th

Success...Santa Tecla celebrate beating Alianza 3-2 at Estadio Cuscatlan in San Salvador to win the Apertura Final in El Salvador

appearance for Juventus ends in disappointment as Milan win 4-3 on penalties, having drawn 1-1 after extra-time, in the Italian Super Cup, which is played in Doha, Qatar.

Saturday December 24

BOLIVIA: The Strongest beat Bolivar 2-1 in a play-off to win the Apertura championship.

CHINA: The Chinese FA issues a draft proposal on cutting the maximum number of non-Asian players in a Chinese Super League club's squad from four to three.

Sunday December 25

MEXICO: Tigres win the Liga MX Apertura title, beating Club America on penalties following a 1-1 draw after extra time that saw the Final finish 2-2 on aggregate.

Tuesday December 27

ENGLAND: The first American to manage in a major European league, Bob Bradley lasts just 85 days at ➤

Champions...Tigres triumph in Mexico

DR CONGO

MARK GLEESON

Boss... Moise Katumbi (in hat)

Mazembe in decline

Political upheaval hurting former African champions

With five African titles, TP Mazembe of the Democratic Republic of Congo are the continent's second-most successful club of all time. But a decade of dominance could now be at an end as the political crisis in their homeland threatens to cut the resources that have driven the team's recent success.

The club's benefactor, Moise Katumbi, has gone into exile after daring to put himself forward as a candidate to become the country's new president. He now faces criminal charges designed to take him out of the race as incumbent Joseph Kabila tries to hang onto power even though his term is up.

Katumbi's backing of Mazembe offered him a profile that led to his election as governor of Katanga in 2007. With the province's coffers under his control he was able to make the club even bigger, building Mazembe a new 25,000-seat stadium, hiring coaches from France and buying Africa's best players.

Mazembe won the CAF Champions League in 2015, to add to those of 2009 and 2010, and were twice winners of the old-format African Cup of Champions Clubs, in 1967 and 1968.

Last year they were knocked out in the early rounds in defence of their Champions League title and dropped into the African Confederation Cup, which they went on to win. They will now play 2016 Champions League winners Mamelodi Sundowns of South Africa for the African Super Cup on February 18.

The one-off game is traditionally held at the home of the Champions League holders and is therefore set for Pretoria. And it might be the last chance that Mazembe have of a tilt at a continental title for quite some time as their immediate future without Katumbi's hand looks bleak.

His exile to Belgium leaves a club that was founded by Benedictine monks in 1939 with an unsure future and dwindling resources.

Having read the writing on the wall, coach Hubert Velud left at the start of January for a new job at Etoile du Sahel of Tunisia – the club Mazembe beat in the Confederation Cup semi-finals. And the Frenchman's departure has left Mazembe in a state of flux as they prepare themselves for the forthcoming season.

Winners...Confederation Cup

Mazembe have stood virtually alone as a bulwark against the dominance of the clubs from the Arabic-speaking north of Africa in the Champions League in recent years and they earned a reputation for some canny buying, not least in acquiring Tanzanian striker Mbwana Samatta (who is now in Belgium with Genk), Mali international defender Salif Coulibaly and the Zambian pair Rainford Kalaba and Nathan Sinkala.

Mazembe were the first African side to reach the Club World Cup Final, beating Internacional of Brazil in the semi-finals in 2010 to finish runners-up behind Internazionale in Abu Dhabi.

Sundowns did poorly in Japan on their Club World Cup debut in December, conceding seven goals in two games, but they will fancy their chances of claiming the Super Cup against Mazembe – particularly on home soil – as the pecking order in the African game looks to be changing. WS

➤ Swansea City before being fired.

Wednesday December 28

SPAIN: Former Tottenham Hotspur and Real Madrid boss Juande Ramos leaves Malaga by mutual consent after seven months in charge.

Thursday December 29

CHINA: Carlos Tevez joins Shanghai Shenhua from Boca Juniors, while Cristiano Ronaldo's agent, Jorge Mendes, says Real Madrid were offered €300m for his client.

Friday December 30

SPAIN: Cesare Prandelli resigns as coach of Valencia after just 10 games in charge.
WALES: The New Saints beat Cefn Druids 2-0 to set a new world record of 27 consecutive top-flight victories.

Saturday December 31

SCOTLAND: Celtic come from behind to beat Rangers 2-1 and move 19 points clear of their Glasgow rivals at the top of the table.

Sunday January 1

JAPAN: Brazilian midfielder Fabricio's extra-time winner sees Kashima Antlers beat Kawasaki Frontale 2-1 to claim a fifth Emperor's Cup and complete the domestic double.

Monday January 2

AUSTRALIA: Besart Berisha sets a new A-League scoring record with his 91st goal as Melbourne Victory beat Newcastle Jets 4-2.

Tuesday January 3

AUSTRALIA: John Van't Schip quits his job as coach of Melbourne City so he can return home to be with his ill father in Holland.
BRAZIL: Chapecoense say they will sign up to 20 new players for next season, reserving the shirt numbers of those who survived the November plane crash that killed 19 players and coaching staff on their way to the Sudamericana Cup Final.
ENGLAND: Paul Clement signs a two-and-a-half-year deal and becomes the fourth man to take charge of Swansea City this term. Hull City sack Mike Phelan after five defeats in his last seven games.

Wednesday January 4

CYPRUS: Trailing 2-0 at home to Ethnikos Achnas with less than 20 minutes left to play, Omonia's English striker Matt Derbyshire scores a hat-trick in under five minutes to clinch a 3-2 victory.
ENGLAND: Chelsea lose 2-0 at ➤

China

JOHN DUERDEN

Money to burn

Club spending prompts action from the authorities

By now, Chinese fans know that in the weeks leading up to the opening of a transfer window – especially the winter one ahead of a new season – two things are certain. The first is that big names will sign for Chinese Super League clubs; the second is that many more will be linked with moves. These "unnamed Chinese clubs" feature regularly in English websites, bringing not only clicks but also the gratitude of agents all over Europe.

In January, Chelsea's Oscar was signed by Shanghai SIPG for a fee reported to be around £60million, with the midfielder joining Brazilian compatriot Hulk at the club now coached by Andre Villas-Boas. Soon after, Carlos Tevez was snapped up by city rivals Shanghai Shenhua to become – again, reportedly – the highest-paid player in the world, on £615,000 a week.

These figures, however, should be taken with a pinch of Sichuan peppercorn.

Chinese teams rarely discuss such matters – and that leaves a vacuum for selling clubs and agents, in whose interests it is to exaggerate the figures. Even so, the sums involved are quite considerable. And after six years and counting of spending that has grown in size and intensity every season, there has been a reaction both at home and overseas.

The vast sums have finally prompted action from the country's authorities. The Chinese FA (CFA) have announced that clubs will only be allowed to field three non-Chinese players when the new season kicks off in March. They will also be required to name two under-23 Chinese players in their matchday squads, with at least one of those in the starting line-up.

Then, in a dramatic move to restrict spending, the CFA announced that clubs must be financially independent of their parent companies. And, from now on, a club that runs at a deficit for three years in a row will be expelled from the CSL.

Win...Luiz Felipe Scolari led Guangzhou Evergrande to the title

In a statement, the CFA explained: "The CFA will hire a third-party audit company to audit professional clubs, to closely inspect club's funding sources, expenses, youth investment, salary payment methods, and publish the revenue and expenditure report to the public, and remove from the register clubs with serious insolvency issues."

The CFA move followed an earlier statement from the State General Administration of Sports – the country's highest sports authority – who issued a yellow card to clubs that were spending excessively. The spree, said a spokesperson, had resulted in "the grave phenomenon of clubs burning money, salaries that are too high for foreign players, not attaching importance to youth training, and only emphasising short-term achievements and neglecting long-term development".

Pressure had been building behind the scenes for some time, ever since clubs started splashing serious

Incoming...Oscar arrives at Shanghai airport

> "The Chinese market is a danger for all. Not only for Chelsea, but all the teams in the world"
>
> Chelsea manager Antonio Conte

cash in 2014. In December, the *People's Daily* – which doesn't publish anything the government does not agree with – ran an editorial calling for a cooling period.

In Europe, and especially England, the financial strength of this new power from the east has led to Chelsea manager Antonio Conte stating: "The Chinese market is a danger for all. Not only for Chelsea, but all the teams in the world."

That comment was well-reported in China and, although a little over the top, plenty of people in Asia and Europe noted the irony of a coach of a club that became a member of the global elite on the back of massive investment by a Russian owner, Roman Abramovich, early in the last decade.

Former Croatia midfielder Mario Stanic, who spent the last few years of his career with Chelsea, expressed similar concerns about when the Londoners, or Conte's previous club Juventus, were outbidding everyone else.

Danger...Antonio Conte is worried

"So, if Juventus is taking players from smaller clubs, it is OK and everyone should be honoured and proud, but when Chinese clubs throw money on the table it is wrong?" asked Stanic. "I am glad that Chinese clubs have shown up. Europe's biggest clubs are a little scared now."

With professional football in the country barely two decades old, there are no illusions in China that there is still a long way to go. But while there is no doubt that recent spending by clubs has made the Chinese Super League stronger, more exciting and more glamorous, some have been left wondering whether shelling out hundreds of millions of pounds on importing coaches such as Luiz Felipe Scolari and players like Oscar, Hulk and Tevez has actually been worth it.

Whether the recent CFA action will curb spending remains to be seen as the new rules and financial regulations will take some time to implement. In the meantime, the big names keep arriving. WS

➤ Tottenham Hotspur and fail to set a new record of 14 consecutive wins in an English top-flight campaign.

Thursday January 5

AFRICA: Riyad Mahrez is named CAF's player of last year, ahead of Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang and Sadio Mane.
ENGLAND: Bottom of the league, Hull City appoint Marco Silva as manager until the end of the season.
ISRAEL: Hanan Maman scores four goals in the space of 11 minutes as Hapoel Haifa beat Kfar Kasem 6-1 in the State Cup.
SPAIN: Osasuna sack coach Joaquin Caparros after less than two months in charge with the side bottom of the league. Despite having two players sent off late on, Athletic Bilbao beat Barcelona 2-1 in the first leg of their Spanish Cup tie.

Friday January 6

ENGLAND: A first FA Cup tie at the London Stadium ends with West Ham losing 5-0 to Manchester City, whose manager Pep Guardiola is making his debut in the competition.
USA: Dallas midfielder Ryan Hollingshead fractures three cervical vertebrae when he is struck by a car after getting out of his own vehicle to help another driver who had been in an accident.

Saturday January 7

ENGLAND: Wayne Rooney equals Bobby Charlton's Manchester United record with his 249th goal for the club in a 4-0 victory over Reading in the FA Cup.
FRANCE: Julian Draxler scores on his Paris Saint-Germain debut in a 7-0 French Cup win against Bastia.
IRAN: Carlos Queiroz resigns as national coach of Iran, citing a lack of support from the country's football federation.
MEXICO: Twelve days after Tigres were crowned Apertura champions, the Liga MX Clausura restarts with wins for Veracruz and Cruz Azul.

Sunday January 8

ITALY: Juventus beat Bologna 3-0 to set a new Serie A record of 26 consecutive home wins.

Monday January 9

FIFA: Real Madrid forward Cristiano Ronaldo is named the world's best player at the inaugural Best FIFA Football Awards in Zurich.

Tuesday January 10

ENGLAND: New Crystal Palace manager Sam Allardyce appoints his former England assistant Sammy Lee as his number two.
FIFA: The 2026 World Cup finals will feature 48 teams, with an initial 16 groups of three sides preceding a knockout stage for the remaining 32 after FIFA votes unanimously in favour of the change.
FRANCE: Lyon president Jean-Michel Aulas claims Alexandre Lacazette is the subject of a €70m bid but insists the club will not sell the striker.
GUINEA-BISSAU: The national team end strike action over unpaid wages four days before the start of the Africa Cup of Nations, in which they are set to make their debut.
SPAIN: Valencia confirm Voro, who was named interim coach for the third time in little over a year after Cesare Prandelli's exit, will remain in charge until the end of the season.
TRINIDAD & TOBAGO: Little more than a month after being appointed Trinidad & Tobago coach, Tom Saintfiet resigns following the team's elimination from the CONCACAF Gold Cup qualifying competition.
UGANDA: Members of Uganda's parliament agree to donate around $150 each to help fund the national team at the African Nations Cup in Gabon. The Ugandan FA had to borrow money to send the squad to a pre-tournament training camp.

Wednesday January 11

ENGLAND: Former France and Chelsea midfielder Claude Makelele joins Swansea City as assistant manager until the end of the season.
JAPAN: Kazuyoshi Miura, who became the domestic league's oldest goalscorer at 49 last season, will take his professional career into his 50s by signing a new contract with second-tier Yokohama.
SERBIA: UEFA ban Partizan Belgrade from Europe for three seasons after they break the rules on unpaid debts three times over the past five years.
SPAIN: Luis Suarez scores his 100th goal for Barcelona, in his 120th game, as they beat Athletic Bilbao 4-3 on aggregate to reach the quarter-finals of the Spanish Cup.

Thursday January 12

ALGERIA: Saphir Taider of Bologna is ruled out of the African Nations Cup after a training-ground collision and is replaced in the Algeria squad by Arsenal's Ismael Bennacer.
ENGLAND: Graham Taylor, who was England manager from 1990 to 1993, dies at the age of 72.
SPAIN: Real Madrid set a new Spanish record of 40 games without defeat as Karim Benzema's 93rd-minute goal snatches a 3-3 ➤

Romania

EMANUEL ROSU

Steaua set to be lost for ever

Former European champions in legal threat over status

Romanian football is facing its biggest crisis since the fall of the communist regime in 1989 as a lack of strategy and vision from national bodies and club owners has left the league in a state of undeniable mediocrity. And Steaua, the country's biggest club, are no different.

The 1986 European Cup winners are not struggling to pay salaries like most, but Steaua's problem is far bigger – and involves their very identity.

Figures from a survey last year show that 49 per cent of Romanian football fans are Steaua supporters. But who exactly are the team that they follow? Is it the same Steaua who won the country's hearts 31 years ago with a penalty shoot-out victory over Barcelona? Is it the Steaua who won 26 national championships and 22 domestic cups?

The Romanian army say the Steaua people used to know no longer exists, so a new one must be created, and a recent court decision confirmed that the army has exclusive rights to use the Steaua "brand" and all symbols related to it: the name, crest and history. This comes 14 years after real-estate tycoon Gigi Becali took over the club and made it a privately owned business.

Becali believes his rise to power hides no shady dealings and he is convinced that the supreme court, his last chance to turn things around, will rule in his favour. Yet Florin Talpan, the Romanian army's lawyer,

Name game... Steaua's Wilfred Moke (left) and Marko Momcilovic

Falling apart... Fernando Boldrin in Europa League action

describes Becali's fight as "impossible" and regards his adversary as the villain of the story.

"Mr Becali used fake documents to take hold of the club," says Talpan. "The situation is very simple. Becali's team must be relegated with immediate effect. They should start from the fourth or fifth division, while the real Steaua, the one recreated by the army, must take their place in the first division."

Becali claims to have papers and logical arguments on his side, saying: "If it wasn't for me, then Steaua would be history today. The end.

"I saved it. It was me and my money. I got money coming in the country, I bought players and paid taxes of millions to the Romanian state. I am 100 per cent clean. I am right and I can't lose this battle."

The Romanian league could be forced to make a historical decision and officials have advised Becali to change his team's name with immediate effect.

"I'll call it Star [the English translation for "Steaua"], FC Star," says Becali. "But don't allow the army to fool you. This is Steaua. I have Steaua. There is only one Steaua team and that's my Steaua."

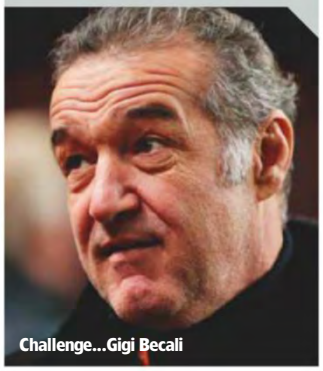
Talpan, however, was quick to respond, stating: "Hope he'll make sure not even an acronym like FCSB will be used from now on because that will only lead to confusion. We have the history and everything related to the Steaua brand.

"We should get Becali's players as well, because when he illegally took charge, he also had a proper squad to count on."

Confusing? Supporters might argue that a better description would be chaos.

The two main Steaua ultras groups have already abandoned Becali's club, while attendances are dropping. Steaua went into 2017 on a historical low, with just a few hundred in attendance at the National Arena for their last games of the autumn campaign. The days when tens of thousands took the stadium by storm for local or European derbies now seem to be from a forgotten era.

> "If it wasn't for me, then Steaua would be history today"
>
> Club owner Gigi Becali



Challenge...Gigi Becali

"Above anything, we want a clean club," vows ultras leader Alexandru Tofan. "We feel we have been without a team for more than two years, ever since the first court decided Becali's club should change its crest. We just want our club back, that's all.

"We are not going to the stadium until we have a new Steaua team playing, The one created in 1947, with its colours, crest and history."

The army's reaction has been to officially announce the creation of a new team. Club hero Marius Lacatus was appointed director of football, while other 1986 winners declared they will be part of the project.

Helmuth Duckadam, who saved four Barcelona penalties in the 1986 European Final, is the only big name behind Becali and says: "These attacks aren't surprising to me. Becali worked with many of my former colleagues, they earned tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands of euros, and it didn't bother them one bit.

"Now they come and say Becali is a thief and that he stole the club. I think this is very low."

Becali is convinced the army's club will fail, arguing: "If this continues, the Steaua brand will disappear from Europe. They won't be able to play in the top two divisions. UEFA doesn't allow a team owned by a political department to play professional football. They just want to destroy me and what I've built."

Three former champions – Rapid, Petrolul and Otelul – went bankrupt last year, but disappearing is not an option at Steaua, as the club loved and hated by millions is keeping the country's terminally ill domestic game alive. The question is: for how much longer? WS

➤ draw at Sevilla in the Spanish Cup.
SWEDEN: Four days after becoming the second-youngest player to be capped by Sweden, Alexander Isak sets a new mark as their youngest-scorer, at 17 years and 113 days, with a goal in a 6-0 win over Slovakia.

Friday January 13

CENTROAMERICANA CUP: Belize pull off the biggest surprise on the opening day of the finals, holding hosts Panama to a goalless draw.
SPAIN: Barcelona sack Pere Gratacos, the director of training and education at Camp Nou, after he suggests Lionel Messi would not be as good a player were it not for his team-mates.

Saturday January 14

AFRICAN NATIONS CUP: Juary Soares' last-minute goal sees tournament debutants Guinea-Bissau draw 1-1 with hosts Gabon in the finals' opening game.
AUSTRALIA: Western Sydney Wanderers keeper Vedran Janjetovic is pelted with toy snakes as he plays in a goalless draw against his former club Sydney.
ENGLAND: Chelsea drop striker Diego Costa amid rumours of a big-money offer from China and a training-ground row but still win 3-0 away to Leicester City.
KOSOVO: Valon Berisha is named Kosovo's player of the year.
PORTUGAL: Trailing 3-0 after 25 minutes at home to Boavista, Benfica hit back to draw 3-3 as their eight-match winning run comes to an end.
SPAIN: Lionel Messi scores in Barcelona's 5-0 thrashing of Las Palmas to equal Raul's record of finding the net against 35 different opponents in La Liga.
WALES: A 94th-minute equaliser ends The New Saints' world-record run of 27 consecutive victories as they draw 3-3 with Newtown.

Sunday January 15

ENGLAND: Pep Guardiola suffers the biggest league loss of his managerial career as Manchester City lose 4-0 at Everton. Manchester United grab a late goal to draw 1-1 at home to Liverpool.
FRANCE: Monaco replace Nice at the top of Ligue 1 with a 4-1 win away at Marseille.
HOLLAND: Justin Kluivert, the 17-year-old son of ex-Holland striker

Uruguay

TIM VICKERY

Tabarez eyes the future

Under-20s the key to senior success

During the 11-year reign of Oscar Tabarez, Uruguay have become a force once again. In his first spell as national coach he took them to Italia 90, but thereafter *La Celeste* only reached one of the next four World Cup finals – in 2002, when they fell in the group phase. However, since he returned in 2006, things improved as they reached the semi-finals of the 2010 World Cup, won the Copa America the following year and are currently well placed to qualify for Russia 2018.

Key to this success has been the importance attached to the national under-20 side.

In this age of global football, it is impossible for a country as small as Uruguay – with a population little over three million – to hold on to its best players, who are inevitably sold by clubs eager to cash in. And so it is in this environment that the national youth set-up becomes vital in establishing a bond between the promising talent who will soon be living abroad and the national side.

Playing for the country's junior teams gives the youngsters a crash course in the tradition and identity of the sky-blue shirt. And therefore this year's South American Under-20 Championship, held in Ecuador from January 18 to February 11, is an extremely important stepping stone in terms of Uruguay's footballing development.

Results are not the big priority – although the pressure is on to finish in the top four as these sides

Runners-up... Uruguay prior to the Under-20 World Cup Final in 2013

Patrick Kluivert, makes his Ajax debut in a 3-1 win at PEC Zwolle.
ITALY: Juventus' lead at the top of Serie A is cut to one point as they lose 2-1 at Fiorentina.
SPAIN: Stevan Jovetic scores a late winner for Sevilla to end Real Madrid's 40-game unbeaten run with a 2-1 victory.

Monday January 16

GERMANY: Horst Hrubesch is named interim sporting director at the DFB after Hansi Flick steps down to spend more time with his family.
KUWAIT: Al Kuwait win the Kuwait Crown Prince Cup for a sixth time, beating Al Qadsia on penalties.
SPAIN: A study carried out by a team of academics from the CIES Football Observatory using a transfer value algorithm values Neymar the most valuable player in Europe, at £216m, ahead of Barcelona team-mate Lionel Messi, at £149m.

Tuesday January 17

EGYPT: Essam El Hadary, Egypt's 44-year-old keeper, replaces Ahmed El Shenawy in the 25th minute of the 0-0 draw with Mali to become the oldest player to appear in the finals of the African Nations Cup.

Wednesday January 18

COSTA RICA: Bryan Ruiz is voted CONCACAF Player of the Year for the first time.
EGYPT: A lawyer for Mohamed Aboutrika, who won 100 caps for Egypt before retiring in 2013, says the 38-year-old has been placed on a terror list for alleged links with the banned Muslim Brotherhood.
HOLLAND: Louis Van Gaal, who has been out of work since leaving Manchester United in May, denies a report in *De Telegraaf* that he is retiring as a coach.
PORTUGAL: Riot police are called out to protect Sporting players as fans gathered outside the team's Lisbon headquarters to protest after a 1-0 loss away to Chaves in the Portuguese Cup on Tuesday evening ended any realistic hopes of the club winning a major trophy this season.
SOUTH KOREA: The AFC rules that Jeonbuk Motors may not play in this year's Champions League due to their indirect involvement in activities aimed at arranging or influencing the outcome of games during the 2013 and 2014 K-League seasons. WS

will go through to the summer's Under-20 World Cup in South Korea. With Brazil and Argentina both having failed to qualify in recent years, Uruguay's progress to the finals is no foregone conclusion, but since Tabarez took over the senior side Uruguay's juniors have always made the cut.

In 2013 they made it all the way to the Final, where they lost on penalties to France in Turkey, but the success or failure of every crop of young players is measured by one criteria: how many go on to become important members of the senior side.

And it is here that Uruguay have been most successful. In 2007 the under-20 team produced Luis Suarez, Edinson Cavani and Martin Caceres. Two years later came Nico Lodeiro, Abel Hernandez, Gaston Ramirez and Sebastian Coates. The 2011 side had Matias Vecino, while the 2013 runners-up included Jose Maria Gimenez, Diego Rolan, Gaston Silva, Diego Laxalt and Giorgian De Arrascaeta in their ranks – all of whom have appeared, or at least been in the squad, for the 2018 World Cup qualifiers. Gaston Guruceaga, who kept goal in 2015 has already received a senior call-up, as has midfielder Nahitan Nandez, while midfielder Gaston Pereiro may well be the next.

> **The national youth set-up is vital in establishing a bond between the promising talent who will soon be living abroad and the national side**

Boss...Oscar Tabarez

This year's crop, then, have a lot to live up to, although a few are already making names for themselves.

Rodrigo Bentancur, an elegant midfielder who is as versatile as a left-footed Lucho Gonzalez, will soon be swapping Boca Juniors in Argentina for Juventus. Nicolas Schiappacasse, a striker with a wonderful change of pace, impressed in last year's Libertadores for little Uruguayan club River Plate and has since moved on to Atletico Madrid B. And Joaquin Ardaiz is a well-built, skilful left-footed striker who will not be staying at Danubio for very much longer.

While this talented trio are expected to play significant roles in Ecuador, for Tabarez it is all about what they and their under-20 team-mates might be able to offer the senior side in the not-too-distant future. WS

Club football

WORLD

CLUB WORLD CUP

Played in Japan

1st round

Dec 8 - Yokohama
Kashima Antlers (Jap) 2 (Akasaki 67, Kanazaki 88)
Auckland City (NZ) 1 (Kim 50)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 17,667. **Ref:** Sikazwe (Zam)
Kashima: Sogahata - Nishi, Hwang, Shoji, Yamamoto, Endo (Nakamura 84), Ogasawara (Kanazaki 63), Nagaki, Shibasaki, Fabricio (Akasaki 54), Doi.
Auckland: Zubikarai - White, Kim, Berlanga, Iwata, Riera, Tade (Berry 90+3), Tavano, Lewis, De Vries (Lea'alafa 83), Joao Moreira.

● *Kashima Antlers qualified for the 2nd round, which America, Jeonbuk Motors & Mamelodi Sundowns entered directly*

2nd round

Dec11 - Osaka
Jeonbuk Motors (SKo) 1 (Kim Bo-kyung 23)
America (Mex) 2 (Romero 58, 74)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 14,587. **Ref:** Kassai (Hun)
Jeonbuk: Hong Jeong-nam - Lim Jong-eun, Shin Hyung-min, Choi Chul-soon, Kim Chang-soo (Ko Moo-yeol 77), Kim Bo-kyung, Jeong Hyuk (Leonardo 66), Lee Jae-sung, Park Won-jae, Edu (Lee Dong-gook 76), Kim Shin-wook.
America: Munoz - Valdez, Alvarez (Arroyo 46), Goltz, Aguilar, Samudio, Martinez (Guerrero 46), William da Silva, Peralta, Quintero (Alvarado 70), Romero.

Dec11 - Osaka
Mamelodi Sundowns (SAf) 0
Kashima Antlers 2 (Endo 63, Kanazaki 88)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 21,702. **Ref:** Garcia (Mex)
Mamelodi: Onyango - Morena (Laffor 71), Arendse, Ricardo Nascimento, Langerman, Kekana, Mabunda, Dolly, Tau, Billiat (Vilakazi 79), Castro (S Zwane 65).
Kashima: Sogahata - Nishi, Ueda, Shoji, Yamamoto, Endo (Sugimoto 89), Nagaki, Shibasaki, Nakamura (Kanazaki 61), Akasaki (Suzuki 84), Doi.

● *America & Kashima Antlers qualified for the semi-finals, which Atletico Nacional & Real Madrid entered directly; Jeonbuk Motors & Mamelodi Sundowns entered 5th-place match*

5th-place match

Dec14 - Osaka
Jeonbuk Motors 4 (Kim Bo-kyung 18, Lee Jong-ho 29, Ricardo Nascimento og 41, Kim Shin-wook 89)
Mamelodi Sundowns 1 (Tau 48)
HT: 3-0. **Att:** 5,938. **Ref:** Shukralla (Bhn)
Jeonbuk: Hong Jeong-nam - Choi Chul-soon, Kim Young-chan, Lim Jong-eun, Park Won-jae, Jang Yun-ho (Lee Han-do 72), Han Kyo-won, Kim Bo-kyung, Lee Jae-sung, Ko Moo-yeol (Leonardo 62), Lee Jong-ho (Kim Shin-wook 78).
Mamelodi: Onyango - Morena (Mohomi 81), Arendse, Ricardo Nascimento, Langerman, Kekana, Mabunda, Billiat (Mbekile 75), Tau, Dolly, Castro (Vilakazi 46).

Semi-finals

Dec14 - Osaka
Atletico Nacional (Col) 0
Kashima Antlers 3 (Doi pen 33, Endo 83, Suzuki 85)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 15,050. **Ref:** Kassai (Hun)
Atletico Nacional: Armani - Bocanegra, Aguilar, Henriquez, Diaz, Uribe, Arias (Guerra 60), Berrio (Rodriguez 87), Torres, Mosquera (Dajome 67), Borja.
Kashima: Sogahata - Nishi, Ueda, Shoji, Yamamoto, Endo, Shibasaki, Ogasawara (Nagaki 58), Nakamura (Suzuki 84), Akasaki (Kanazaki 54), Doi.

Dec15 - Yokohama
America 0
Real Madrid (Spa) 2 (Benzema 45+2, Cristiano Ronaldo 90+3)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 50,117. **Ref:** Caceres (Par)
America: Munoz - Valdez, Alvarado (Guerrero 54), Goltz, Aguilar, Samudio, Ibarra (Quintero 62), William da Silva, Sambueza, Peralta, Romero (Arroyo 70).
Real Madrid: Navas - Carvajal, Varane, Nacho, Marcelo, Modric, Casemiro, Kroos (Rodriguez 72), Lucas Vazquez, Benzema (Morata 80), Cristiano Ronaldo.

3rd-place match

Dec18 - Yokohama
America 2 (Arroyo 38, Peralta pen 66)
Atletico Nacional 2 (Samudio og 6, Guerra 26)
HT: 1-2. **Att:** 44,625. **Ref:** Shukralla (Bhn)
Atletico Nacional 4-3 on pens
America: Munoz - Alvarado (Quintero 46), Valdez, Aguilar, Pimentel, Samudio, Guerrero, William da Silva, Sambueza (Martinez 70), Arroyo, Romero (Peralta 59).
Atletico Nacional: Armani - Bocanegra, Aguilar, Henriquez, Diaz, Uribe (Nieto 70), Arias, Berrio (Rodriguez 89), Torres, Mosquera, Guerra (Borja 78).

Final

Dec18 - Yokohama
Real Madrid 4 (Benzema 9, Cristiano Ronaldo pen 60, 98, 104)
Kashima Antlers 2 (Shibasaki 44, 52)
Aet. **HT:** 1-1. **90mins:** 2-2. **Att:** 68,742.
Ref: Sikazwe (Zam)
Real Madrid: Navas - Carvajal, Varane, Sergio Ramos (Nacho 108), Marcelo, Modric (Kovacic 105), Casemiro, Kroos, Lucas Vazquez (Isco 81), Benzema, Cristiano Ronaldo (Morata 112).
Kashima: Sogahata - Nishi, Ueda, Shoji, Yamamoto, Endo (Ito 103), Nagaki (Akasaki 114), Ogasawara (Fabricio 68), Shibasaki, Kanazaki, Doi (Suzuki 88).

SOUTH AMERICA

LIBERTADORES CUP

1st qualifying round draw

Deportivo Capiata (Par) v Deportivo Tachira (Ven)
Deportivo Municipal (Per) v Independiente del Valle (Ecu)
Universitario de Sucre (Bol) v Montevideo Wanderers (Uru)
1st legs - Jan 23; 2nd legs - Jan 27

2nd qualifying round draw

Atletico Paranaense (Bra) v Millonarios (Col) (2QR1)
Atletico Tucuman (Arg) v El Nacional (Ecu) (2QR2)
Botafogo (Bra) v Colo Colo (Chl) (2QR3)
Carabobo (Ven) v Junior (Col) (2QR4)
Cerro (Uru) v Union Espanola (Chl) (2QR5)
Deportivo Capiata OR Deportivo Tachira v Universitario (Per) (2QR6)
Deportivo Municipal OR Independiente del Valle v Olimpia (Par) (2QR7)
Universitario de Sucre OR Montevideo Wanderers v The Strongest (Bol) (2QR8)
1st legs - Jan 31-Feb 2; 2nd legs - Feb 7-9

3rd qualifying round draw

2QR1 winner v *2QR6 winner* (3QR1)
2QR3 winner v *2QR7 winner* (3QR2)
2QR4 winner v *2QR2 winner* (3QR3)
2QR5 winner v *2QR8 winner* (3QR4)
1st legs - Feb15/16; 2nd legs - Feb 22/23

● *The 2 losing teams with the best record will enter the Sudamericana Cup*

Group stage draw

Group 1
Atletico Nacional (Col)
Barcelona (Ecu)
Estudiantes (Arg)
3QR2 winner

Group 2
Santa Fe (Col)
Santos (Bra)
Sporting Cristal (Per)
3QR4 winner

Group 3
Emelec (Ecu)
Independiente Medellin (Col)
Melgar (Per)
River Plate (Arg)

Group 4
Flamengo (Bra)
San Lorenzo (Arg)
Universidad Catolica (Chl)
3QR1 winner

Group 5
Jorge Wilstermann (Bol)
Palmeiras (Bra)
Penarol (Uru)
3QR3 winner

Group 6
Atletico Mineiro (Bra)
Godoy Cruz (Arg)
Libertad (Par)
Sport Boys (Bol)

Group 7
Chapecoense (Bra)
Lanus (Arg)
Nacional (Uru)
Zulia (Ven)

Group 8
Deportes Iquique (Chl)
Gremio (Bra)
Guarani (Par)
Zamora (Ven)

Ties to be played Mar 7-May 25

● *The top 2 in each group will qualify for the 1st knockout round (last 16); the 3rd-placed teams will enter the Sudamericana Cup*

BOLIVIA

2016-17 – APERTURA – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
The Strongest[1]	22	14	7	1	44	12	49
Bolivar[1]	22	15	4	3	46	21	49
Oriente	22	10	4	8	25	31	34
Real Potosi	22	9	4	9	33	30	31
Blooming	22	8	5	9	24	25	29
Wilstermann	22	8	5	9	28	34	29
Nacional	22	8	4	10	41	47	28
Sport Boys	22	6	8	8	27	31	26
Universitario	22	6	7	9	27	37	25
San Jose	22	7	3	12	29	42	24
Petrolero	22	6	5	11	20	19	23
Guabira	22	6	2	14	27	42	20

[1]*The top 2 went into the apertura championship decider (see below) after finishing level on points*

2016-17 Apertura Championship Decider
Dec 24: The Strongest 2 Bolivar 1.

COLOMBIA

2016 – CLAUSURA: REGULAR – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
At Nacional (Q)	20	9	10	1	32	19	37
Dep Cali (Q)	20	10	4	6	25	17	34
Tolima (Q)	20	8	9	3	25	16	33
Santa Fe (Q)	20	9	6	5	22	15	33
I Medellin (Q)	20	9	6	5	31	26	33
Millonarios (Q)	20	10	3	7	28	23	33
Buc'manga (Q)	20	9	5	6	26	19	32
Patriotas (Q)	20	9	5	6	23	19	32
Envigado	20	9	5	6	23	20	32
A Petrolera	20	8	6	6	22	17	30
Junior	20	7	7	6	25	27	28
Rionegro A	20	7	5	8	23	28	26
Once Caldas	20	7	4	9	25	24	25
La Equidad	20	5	8	7	24	27	23
Jaguares	20	6	5	9	16	20	23
Atletico Huila	20	6	5	9	18	27	23
Fortaleza (R)[1]	20	5	5	10	20	28	20
Dep Pasto	20	5	5	10	19	28	20
Cortulua	20	3	5	12	22	34	14
B'ca Chico (R)[1]	20	4	2	14	18	33	14

The top 8 qualified for the quarter-finals
[1]*Relegated: the 2 teams with the lowest points-per-game average over the 3 most recent seasons*

Quarter-finals
1st legs - Nov 26/27; 2nd legs - Dec 3/4
Bucaramanga v Deportivo Cali 2-1, 1-1 (agg 3-2)
Indep Medellin v Santa Fe 1-2, 0-2 (agg 1-4)
Millonarios v Atletico Nacional 2-1, 0-3 (agg 2-4)
Patriotas v Tolima 1-2, 1-0
(agg 2-2, Tolima 3-0 on pens)

Semi-finals
1st legs - Dec 7/8; 2nd legs - Dec11
Bucaramanga v Tolima 1-0, 1-2
(agg 2-2, Tolima 4-2 on pens)
Santa Fe v Atletico Nacional 1-1, 4-0 (agg 5-1)

2016 Clausura Championship Final
1st leg - Dec14; 2nd leg - Dec18
Tolima v Santa Fe 0-0, 0-1 (agg 0-1)

ECUADOR

2016 – 2ND STAGE – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Barcelona (C)[1]	22	16	4	2	42	16	52
Emelec	22	14	3	5	44	25	45
Univ Catolica	22	8	7	7	29	33	31
Independiente	22	9	3	10	27	26	30
LDU Quito	22	8	6	8	21	30	30
El Nacional	22	7	8	7	31	30	29
Mushuc R (R)[2]	22	8	4	10	30	36	28
Delfin	22	7	4	11	28	32	25
Cuenca	22	7	5	10	30	35	26
F'za Amarilla	22	6	7	9	27	34	25
Aucas (R)[2]	22	5	9	8	26	27	24
River Ecuador	22	6	2	14	20	31	20

[1]*Barcelona are 2016 champions because they also won the 1st stage*
[2]*Relegated: the 2 teams with fewest points in the combined 1st/2nd stage table*

PARAGUAY

2016 – CLAUSURA – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Guarani (C)	22	15	3	4	32	19	48
Olimpia	22	14	5	3	44	22	47
Libertad	22	11	6	5	33	22	39
Capiata	22	10	7	5	33	25	37
Cerro Porteno	22	9	8	5	45	30	35
Nacional	22	9	4	9	33	34	31
Sol America	22	7	7	8	32	34	28
Luqueno	22	6	8	8	19	31	26
General Diaz	22	5	7	10	20	28	22
Caballero (R)[1]	22	4	8	10	23	34	20
Rubio Nu	22	3	6	13	15	27	15
Riv Plate (R)[1]	22	3	3	16	25	48	12

[1]*Relegated: the 2 teams with the lowest points-per-game average over the 3 most recent seasons*

PERU

2016 – LIGUILLA A – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sp Cristal[1] (Q)	44	21	12	11	70	48	77
Melgar (Q)	44	21	11	12	68	48	74
Municipal (Q)	44	19	12	13	54	52	69
Juan Aurich	44	14	17	13	58	57	59
Real Garcilaso	44	16	9	19	55	62	57
U Comercio	44	14	14	16	51	55	56
C Vallejo (R)[4]	44	11	13	20	52	71	46
Defensor[2] (R)[4]	44	9	15	20	65	83	32

[1]*Received 2 bonus points after club won the reserve league*
[2]*10pts deducted: 4 for not paying players on time; 6 for breaching playing time regulations*

2016 – LIGUILLA B – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Univers'io[3] (Q)	44	20	11	13	73	61	72
Alianza Lima	44	19	9	16	56	44	66
Comerciantes	44	17	12	15	64	53	63
Sp Huancayo	44	16	14	14	52	44	62
U San Martin	44	15	10	19	61	72	55
Alianza Atl'ico	44	16	7	21	63	76	55
UT Cajamarca	44	12	18	14	57	61	54
Ayacucho	44	12	16	16	47	59	52

[3]*Received 1 bonus point after club finished 2nd in the reserve league*

The 4 teams with the best record at the end of the liguilla stage (the tables include the results of the 15 apertura rounds, the 15 clausura rounds and the 14 liguilla-stage rounds) entered the 2016 overall championship semi-finals
[4]*Relegated: the 2 teams with fewest points at the end of the liguilla stage*

Semi-finals
1st legs - Nov 30; 2nd legs - Dec 4
Municipal v Sporting Cristal 1-0, 0-1
(agg 1-1, Sporting Cristal 3-2 on pens)
Universitario v Melgar 1-2, 2-2 (agg 3-4)

2016 Overall Championship Final
1st leg - Dec11; 2nd leg - Dec18
Melgar v Sporting Cristal 1-1, 0-0
(agg 1-1, Sporting Cristal on away goals)

AFRICA

CAF CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Preliminary round draw

AC Leopards (Con) v UMS de Loum (Cam)
Barrack Young Controllers (Lbr) v Stade Malien (Mli)
CNaPS (Mad) v Township Rollers (Bot)
Cote d'Or (Sey) v Saint George (Eth)
Coton Sport (Cam) v Atlabara (SSu)
Gambia Ports Authority (Gam) v Sewe Sport (IvC)
Goree (Sen) v Horoya (Gui)
Johansen (SLe) v FUS Rabat (Mor)
JS Saoura (Alg) v Enugu Rangers (Nga)
KCCA (Uga) v Primeiro de Agosto (Ang)
Lioli (Les) v CAPS United (Zim)
Mounana (Gab) v Vital'O (Bdi)
Ngaya (Com) v Young Africans (Tan)
Rail Club du Kadiogo (BuF) v Diables Noirs (Con)
Real Bamako (Mli) v Rivers United (Nga)
Royal Leopards (Swa) v AS Vita (DRC)
Saint-Louisienne (Reu) v Bidvest Wits (SAf)
Sony Ela Nguema (EqG) v Al Merreikh (Sud)
Tanda (IvC) v AS FAN (Nig)
Tusker (Ken) v AS Port-Louis 2000 (Mts)
Wa All Stars (Gha) v Al Ahli Tripoli (Lby)
Zanaco (Zam) v APR (Rwa)
Zimamoto (Zan) v Ferroviario Beira (Moz)
1st legs - Feb10-12; 2nd legs - Feb17-19

Byes to 1st round: Al Ahly (Egy), Al Hilal Omdurman (Sud), Esperance Tunis (Tun), Etoile Sahel (Tun), Mamelodi Sundowns (SAf), TP Mazembe (DRC), USM Alger (Alg), Wydad Casablanca (Mor), Zamalek (Egy)

CONFEDERATION CUP

Preliminary round draw

Akanda (Gab) v Renaissance du Congo (DRC)
Al Hilal Benghazi (Lby) v Ulinzi Stars (Ken)
Al Hilal Obayed (Sud) v St Michel United (Sey)
APEJES Academy (Cam) v Niarry Tally (Sen)
Bechem United (Gha) v MC Alger (Alg)
Defence Force (Eth) v YOSA (Cam)
Douanes (Nig) v Ittihad Tanger (Mor)
Elgeco (Mad) v SuperSport United (SAf)
Etoile du Congo (Con) v Racing Micomeseng (EqG)
Ifeanyi Ubah (Nga) v Al Masry (Egy)
KVZ (Zan) v Le Messager Ngozi (Bdi)
Maghreb Fes (Mor) v CARA (Con)
Monrovia Club Breweries (Lbr) v JS Kabylie (Alg)
Orapa United (Bot) v Mbabane Swallows (Swa)
Pamplemousses (Mts) v Ngezi Platinum (Zim)
Platinum Stars (SAf) v Uniao Desp do Songo (Moz)
RSLAF (SLe) v Wikki Tourists (Nga)
Sonabel (BuF) v SC Gagnoa (IvC)
Vipers (Uga) v Volcan (Com)
Wau Salaam (SSu) v Rayon Sports (Rwa)
1st legs - Feb10-12; 2nd legs - Feb17-19

Byes to 1st round: Al Ahli Shendi (Sud), AS Kaloum (Gui), ASEC Abidjan (IvC), Azam (Tan), Club Africain (Tun), CS Sfaxien (Tun), Djoliba (Mli), Onze Createurs (Mli), Recreativo Libolo (Ang), Sanga Balende (DRC), Smouha (Egy), Zesco United (Zam)

LIBYA

2016 – CHAMPIONSHIP GROUP – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Ahli T'li (C)	4	3	1	0	8	1	10
Asswehly	4	1	3	0	3	1	6
Al Ahli B'zi	4	1	2	1	2	4	5
Al Madina	4	1	1	2	3	4	4
Al Nasr	4	0	1	3	3	9	1

MALAWI

2016 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Kamuzu B (C)	30	19	4	7	55	29	61
Big Bullets	30	16	12	2	43	17	60
Silver Strikers	30	16	8	6	45	23	56
Blue Eagles	30	16	6	8	41	26	54
MAFCO	30	14	8	8	45	33	50
Be Forward	30	13	10	7	51	33	49
Moyale Ba'ks	30	13	8	9	41	26	47
Azam Tigers	30	10	13	7	35	21	43
Mzuni	30	10	11	9	31	29	41
Red Lions	30	11	7	12	33	36	40
EPAC United	30	9	7	14	30	39	34
Dwangwa Utd	30	7	9	14	30	41	30
Wizards	30	8	6	16	17	43	30
Karonga (R)	30	7	6	17	28	64	27
CIVO Utd (R)	30	5	10	15	20	35	25
Max Bullets (R)	30	1	5	24	15	65	8

SAO TOME E PRINCIPE

2016 National Championship Final

(Sao Tome champions Sporting Praia Cruz v Principe champions Sporting Principe)

1st leg - Dec14; 2nd leg - Dec 20
Sporting Principe v Sporting Praia Cruz
1-2, 2-2 (aet) (agg 3-4)

ASIA

AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

1st qualifying round

Global (Phi) v Tampines Rovers (Sin)
Single-leg tie, Jan 24

2nd qualifying round draw

Al Wehdat (Jor) v Bengaluru (Ind)
Bangkok United (Tha) v Johor Darul Ta'zim (Mly)
Brisbane Roar (Aus) v *Global OR Tampines Rovers*
Kitchee (HK) v Ha Noi T&T (Vie)
Nasaf Qarshi (Uzb) v Al Hidd (Bhn)
Sukhothai (Tha) v Yadanarbon (Mym)
Single-leg ties, Jan 25/31

3rd qualifying round draw

Al Fateh (Sau) v *Nasaf Qarshi OR Al Hidd*
Al Wahda (UAE) v *Al Wehdat OR Bengaluru*
El Jaish (Qat) v Bunyodkor (Uzb)
Esteghlal Tehran (Irn) v Al Sadd (Qat)
Gamba Osaka (Jap) v
Bangkok United OR Johor Darul Ta'zim
Ulsan Hyundai (SKo) v *Kitchee OR Ha Noi T&T*
Shanghai Shenhua (Chn) v *Brisbane Roar OR Global OR Tampines Rovers*
Shanghai SIPG (Chn) v *Sukhothai OR Yadanarbon*
Single-leg ties, Feb 7/8

Group stage draw

Group A
Al Ahli (UAE)
Al Taawoun (Sau)
Lokomotiv Tashkent (Uzb)
Esteghlal Tehran OR Al Sadd

Group B
Al Jazira (UAE)
Esteghlal Khuzestan (Irn)
Lekhwiya (Qat)
Al Fateh OR Nasaf Qarshi OR Al Hidd

Group C
Al Ahli (Sau)
Al Ain (UAE)
Zob Ahan (Irn)
El Jaish OR Bunyodkor

Group D
Al Hilal (Sau)
Al Rayyan (Qat)
Persepolis (Irn)
Al Wahda OR Al Wehdat OR Bengaluru

Group E
Kashima Antlers (Jap)
Muangthong United (Tha)
Ulsan Hyundai OR Kitchee OR Ha Noi T&T
Shanghai Shenhua OR Brisbane Roar OR Global OR Tampines Rovers

Group F
Seoul (SKo)
Urawa Red Diamonds (Jap)
Western Sydney Wanderers (Aus)
Shanghai SIPG OR Sukhothai OR Yadanarbon

Group G
Eastern (HK)
Guangzhou Evergrande (Chn)
Kawasaki Frontale (Jap)
Suwon Bluewings (SKo)

Group H
Adelaide United (Aus)
Jeju United (SKo)
Jiangsu Suning (Chn)
Gamba Osaka OR Bangkok United OR Johor Darul Ta'zim

Matchdays: *Feb 20-22, Feb 27-Mar1, Mar13-15, Apr10-12, Apr 24-26, May 8-10*

● *The top 2 in each group will qualify for the 1st knockout round (last16)*

BANGLADESH

2016 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Abahani D (C)	22	15	7	0	48	16	52
Abahani Chit	22	14	5	3	36	15	47
Sheikh Jamal	22	8	8	6	34	30	32
Brothers Union	22	7	9	6	37	34	30
Muktijoddha	22	8	6	8	28	28	30
Arambagh	22	5	12	5	21	21	27
Rahmatganj	22	7	6	9	30	35	27
Sheikh Russel	22	6	7	9	19	24	25
BJMC	22	5	10	7	29	36	25
Mohammedan	22	3	11	8	20	29	20
Feni (R)[1]	22	4	6	12	21	35	18
Baridhara (R)[1]	22	5	3	14	19	39	18

[1]*Originally the 2 bottom teams were due to meet in a relegation play-off after finishing with the same number of points (no other separating factors considered); but both were then relegated by the federation after refusing to participate in the play-off*

INDIA (Super League)

2016 – REGULAR – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Mumbai C (Q)	14	6	5	3	16	8	23
Kerala B (Q)	14	6	4	4	13	15	22
Delhi D (Q)	14	5	6	3	27	17	21
Atl Kolkata (Q)	14	4	8	2	16	14	20
NorthEast Utd	14	5	3	6	14	14	18
Pune City	14	4	4	6	13	16	16
Chennaiyin	14	3	6	5	20	25	15
Goa	14	4	2	8	15	25	14

The top 4 qualified for the semi-finals; no relegation from this league

Semi-finals

1st legs - Dec10/11; 2nd legs - Dec13/14
Atletico de Kolkata v Mumbai City
3-2, 0-0 (agg 3-2)
Kerala Blasters v Delhi Dynamos 1-0, 1-2 (aet)
(agg 2-2, Kerala Blasters 3-0 on pens)

2016 Championship Final

Dec 18: Kerala Blasters 1 Atletico de Kolkata 1 (aet, Atletico de Kolkata 4-3 on pens).

CONCACAF

CONCACAF CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Quarter-finals draw

Dallas (USA) v Arabe Unido (Pan)
New York Red Bulls (USA)
v Vancouver Whitecaps (Can)
Saprissa (CR) v Pachuca (Mex)
Tigres UANL (Mex) v Pumas UNAM (Mex)
1st legs - Feb 21-23; 2nd legs - Feb 28-Mar 2

BELIZE

2016-17 Opening Championship Final

1st leg - Dec 24; 2nd leg - Dec 31
Belize Defence Force v Belmopan Bandits
1-0, 0-4 (agg 1-4)

COSTA RICA

2016-17 – APERTURA: TOP 4 GROUP – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Saprissa (C)[1]	6	4	1	1	11	4	13
Herediano	6	3	2	1	12	4	11
Alajuelense	6	1	2	3	7	12	5
Santos	6	1	1	4	4	14	4

[1]*Saprissa are champions because they also topped the apertura regular-season table*

EL SALVADOR

2016-17 Apertura Championship Final

Dec 18: Alianza 2 Santa Tecla 3.

GUATEMALA

2016-17 Apertura Championship Final

1st leg - Dec15; 2nd leg - Dec18
Antigua v Municipal 2-1, 0-1 (aet)
(agg 2-2, Antigua 5-4 on pens)

HONDURAS

2016-17 Apertura Championship Final

1st leg - Dec11; 2nd leg - Dec18
Motagua v Platense 1-0, 1-1 (agg 2-1)

MEXICO

2016-17 – APERTURA: REGULAR – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Tijuana (Q)	17	10	3	4	25	13	33
Pachuca (Q)	17	9	4	4	36	21	31
Tigres (Q)	17	8	6	3	22	13	30
Guad'jara (Q)	17	8	4	5	21	17	28
America (Q)	17	7	7	3	29	26	28
Pumas (Q)	17	8	3	6	28	22	27
Necaxa (Q)	17	6	8	3	24	18	26
Leon (Q)	17	7	5	5	25	25	26
Monterrey	17	6	7	4	30	21	25
Toluca	17	6	6	5	22	21	24
Queretaro	17	5	5	7	20	24	20
Puebla	17	5	5	7	25	30	20
Morelia	17	5	5	7	28	34	20
Cruz Azul	17	4	7	6	25	23	19
Atlas	17	4	7	6	21	25	19
Santos	17	4	4	9	19	30	16
Veracruz	17	3	3	11	22	38	12
Jaguares	17	2	3	12	9	30	9

The top 8 qualified for the quarter-finals

Quarter-finals

1st legs - Nov 23/24; 2nd legs - Nov 26/27
America v Guadalajara 1-1, 1-0 (agg 2-1)
Leon v Tijuana 3-0, 2-3 (agg 5-3)
Necaxa v Pachuca 2-1, 0-0 (agg 2-1)
Pumas v Tigres 2-2, 0-5 (agg 2-7)

Semi-finals

1st legs - Nov 30/Dec1; 2nd legs - Dec 3/4
Leon v Tigres 0-1, 1-2 (agg 1-3)
Necaxa v America 1-1, 0-2 (agg 1-3)

2016-17 Apertura Championship Final

1st leg - Dec 22; 2nd leg - Dec 25
America v Tigres 1-1, 1-1 (aet)
(agg 2-2, Tigres 3-0 on pens)

PUERTO RICO (PRSL)

(Puerto Rico Soccer League)

2016 Championship Final

Dec 4: Metropolitan 2 Bayamon 2 (aet, Metropolitan 3-1 on pens).

EUROPE

UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

1st knockout round (last 16) draw

Bayer Leverkusen (Ger) v Atletico Madrid (Spa)
(Feb 21 & Mar 15)
Bayern Munich (Ger) v Arsenal (Eng)
(Feb 15 & Mar 7)
Benfica (Por) v Borussia Dortmund (Ger)
(Feb 14 & Mar 8)
Manchester City (Eng) v Monaco (Fra)
(Feb 21 & Mar 15)
Paris Saint-Germain (Fra) v Barcelona (Spa)
(Feb 14 & Mar 8)
Porto (Por) v Juventus (Ita)
(Feb 22 & Mar 14)
Real Madrid (Spa) v Napoli (Ita)
(Feb 15 & Mar 7)
Sevilla (Spa) v Leicester City (Eng)
(Feb 22 & Mar 14)

EUROPA LEAGUE

1st knockout round (last 32) draw

The 8 3rd-placed teams from the UEFA Champions League group stage (marked with asterisk) enter at this stage

Anderlecht (Blg) v Zenit St Petersburg (Rus)
Astra (Rom) v Genk (Blg)
Athletic Bilbao (Spa) v APOEL (Cyp)
AZ Alkmaar (Hol) v Lyon* (Fra)
Celta Vigo (Spa) v Shakhtar Donetsk (Ukr)
Gent (Blg) v Tottenham Hotspur* (Eng)
Hapoel Beer Sheva (Isr) v Besiktas* (Tur)
Krasnodar (Rus) v Fenerbahce[1] (Tur)
Legia Warsaw* (Pol) v Ajax (Hol)
Ludogorets* (Bul) v Copenhagen* (Den)
Manchester United (Eng) v Saint-Etienne[1] (Fra)
Monchengladbach* (Ger) v Fiorentina (Ita)
Olympiakos (Gre) v Osmanlispor (Tur)
PAOK Salonika (Gre) v Schalke[1] (Ger)
Rostov* (Rus) v Sparta Prague (CzR)
Villarreal (Spa) v Roma (Ita)
1st legs - Feb16; 2nd legs - Feb 23 ([1]Feb 22)

OCEANIA

OFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Qualifying round group

Lupe Ole Soaga (Sam), Puaikura (Coo), Utulei Youth (AmS), Veitongo (Ton)
Games to be played Jan 28-Feb 3 in Tonga

● *The top 2 will qualify for the main group stage*

Group stage draw

Group A
Central Sport (Tah)
Hekari United (PNG)
Magenta (NwC)
Qualifying round group runner-up

Group B
Ba (Fij)
Hienghene Sport (NwC)
Team Wellington (NZ)
Qualifying round group winner

Group C
Auckland City (NZ)
Lae City Dwellers (PNG)
Malampa Revivors (Van)
Western United (Sol)

Group D
Erakor Golden Star (Van)
Marist (Sol)
Rewa (Fij)
Tefana (Tah)

Group games will be played in February/March

● *The group winners will qualify for the semi-finals*

NEW CALEDONIA

2016 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts[1]
Magenta (C)	24	17	5	2	83	22	80
Lossi	24	17	5	2	76	24	80
Hienghene	24	17	3	4	90	28	78
Ne Drehu	24	11	7	6	48	40	64
Horizon P[2,3]	24	14	4	6	59	37	60
Mont-Dore	24	11	2	11	53	47	59
Wetr	24	9	5	10	53	46	56
Tiga Sport[4]	24	7	7	10	32	50	51
Belep[5]	24	6	5	13	45	70	44
Poindimie[6]	24	6	2	16	42	69	42
Gaitcha[7] (R)	24	9	2	13	37	64	41
USC (R)	24	3	4	17	27	92	37
Kunie[4] (R)	24	2	3	19	22	78	32

[1] 4pts for a win, 2pts for a draw, 1pt for a defeat
[2] Enter rel/prom play-off as the lowest placed of the 2 clubs in the division not from the main island of Grande Terre (the other club is Ne Drehu)
[3] 10pts deducted [4] 1pt deducted [5] 3pts deducted [6] 2pts deducted [7] 12pts deducted

SOLOMON ISLANDS

2016 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Marist (C)	16	13	1	2	54	18	40
Western Utd	16	10	5	1	72	20	35
Sol Warriors	16	10	2	4	60	20	32
Malaita Kingz	16	9	3	4	32	18	30
Kossa	16	8	2	6	42	25	26
Koloale	16	6	1	9	20	42	19
Kakamora	16	5	2	9	36	46	17
Guadalcanal	16	2	1	13	11	66	7
West Honiara	16	0	1	15	18	90	1

VANUATU (Port Vila League)

2016 – CHAMPIONSHIP GROUP – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Erakor GS (C)	3	1	2	0	5	1	5
Amicale	3	1	2	0	3	2	5
Tafea	3	0	2	1	3	4	2
Ifira Black Bird	3	0	2	1	0	4	2

VANUATU (National Super League)

2016 – CHAMPIONSHIP GROUP – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Nalkutan (C)	5	4	0	1	19	10	12
Vaum United	5	3	1	1	21	10	10
Malampa Rev	5	3	1	1	13	7	10
Medics	5	2	2	1	11	4	8
Spirit 11	5	1	0	4	9	23	3
Rainbow	5	0	0	5	4	23	0

Internationals

AFF CUP

For countries belonging to the ASEAN Football Federation (Association of South East Asian Nations)

Group A
Played in the Philippines

Nov19 - Bocaue
Thailand 4 (Peerapat 4, Teerasil 38, 79, 90+3)
Indonesia 2 (Boaz 53, Lerby 56)
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 1,153. **Ref:** Kovalenko (Uzb)

Nov19 - Bocaue
Philippines 0
Singapore 0
Att: 4,339. **Ref:** Tufayelieh (Syr)
Sent off: Hafiz Abu Sujad (Singapore) 35

Nov 22 - Bocaue
Thailand 1 (Sarawut 89)
Singapore 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 359. **Ref:** Rowan (Ind)

Nov 22 - Bocaue
Indonesia 2 (Fachrudin 7, Boaz 68)
Philippines 2 (Bahadoran 31, P Younghusband 82)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 2,068. **Ref:** Yu (Tai)

Nov 25 - Manila
Singapore 1 (Khairul Amri 27)
Indonesia 2 (Andik 62, Lilipaly 85)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 467. **Ref:** Tufayelieh (Syr)

Nov 25 - Bocaue
Philippines 0
Thailand 1 (Sarawut 81)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 3,185. **Ref:** Kovalenko (Uzb)

AFF CUP – GROUP A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Thailand (Q)	3	3	0	0	6	2	9
Indonesia (Q)	3	1	1	1	6	7	4
Philippines	3	0	2	1	2	3	2
Singapore	3	0	1	2	1	3	1

Group B
Played in Myanmar

Nov 20 - Yangon
Malaysia 3 (Syazwan 37, Amri 69, 80)
Cambodia 2 (Vathanaka 8, 60)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 576. **Ref:** Abdul Baki (Oma)

Nov 20 - Yangon
Myanmar 1 (Aung Thu 73)
Vietnam 2 (Nguyen Van Quyet 24, Le Cong Vinh 80)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 28,040. **Ref:** Kimura (Jap)

Nov 23 - Yangon
Malaysia 0
Vietnam 1 (Nguyen Trong Hoang 80)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 2,542. **Ref:** Kurbanov (Tkm)

Nov 23 - Yangon
Cambodia 1 (Suhana 14)
Myanmar 3 (Zaw Min Tun 35, 40, Aung Thu 57)
HT: 1-2. **Att:** 15,236. **Ref:** Kim Dong-jin (SKo)

Nov 26 - Nay Pyi Taw
Vietnam 2 (Le Cong Vinh 20, Tola og 50)
Cambodia 1 (Polroth 65)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 685. **Ref:** Kimura (Jap)
Sent off: Truong Dinh Luat (Vietnam) 7

Nov 26 - Yangon
Myanmar 1 (David Htan 89)
Malaysia 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 32,758. **Ref:** Abdul Baki (Oma)

AFF CUP – GROUP B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Vietnam (Q)	3	3	0	0	5	2	9
Myanmar (Q)	3	2	0	1	5	3	6
Malaysia	3	1	0	2	3	4	3
Cambodia	3	0	0	3	4	8	0

● *The top 2 in both groups qualified for the semi-finals*

Semi-finals

1st legs

Dec 3 - Bogor
Indonesia 2 (Hansamu 7, Boaz pen 50)
Vietnam 1 (Nguyen Van Quyet pen 17)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 30,000. **Ref:** Gillett (Aus)

Dec 4 - Yangon
Myanmar 0
Thailand 2 (Teerasil 24, 55)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 33,122. **Ref:** Tantashev (Uzb)

2nd legs

Dec 7 - Hanoi
Vietnam 2 (Vu Van Thanh 83, Vu Minh Tuan 90+3)
Indonesia 2 (Lilipaly 54, Manahati pen 97)
Aet. **HT:** 0-0. **90mins:** 2-1. **Att:** 40,000.
Ref: Fu (Chn)
Sent off: Tran Nguyen Manh (Vietnam) 76
Indonesia 4-3 on agg

Dec 8 - Bangkok
Thailand 4 (Sarawut 33, Theerathon pen 66, Siroch 76, Chanathip 83)
Myanmar 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 43,638. **Ref:** Makhadmeh (Jor)
Thailand 6-0 on agg

Final

1st leg

Dec14 - Bogor
Indonesia 2 (Rizky Pora 65, Hansamu 70)
Thailand 1 (Teerasil 33)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 30,000. **Ref:** Iida (Jap)
Indonesia: Kurnia - Beny (Lerby 70), Hansamu, Fachrudin, Abduh, Manahati, Bayu, Andik (Zulham 20), Lilipaly, Rizky Pora, Boaz (Ferdinand 77).
Thailand: Kawin - Tristan, Adison, Koravit, Theerathon, Sarach, Sarawut (Siroch 73), Chanathip, Pokklaw (Chappuis 80), Kroekrit (Peerapat 67), Teerasil.

2nd leg

Dec17 - Bangkok
Thailand 2 (Siroch 39, 47)
Indonesia 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 48,000.
Ref: Mohamed Abdulla (UAE)
Thailand 3-2 on agg
Thailand: Kawin - Adison, Tanaboon, Pratum, Tristan, Chappuis (Pokklaw 82), Sarach, Theerathon, Chanathip (Prakit 90+6), Teerasil, Siroch (Sarawut 90).
Indonesia: Kurnia - Beny (Dedi 46), Hansamu, Fachrudin, Abduh, Manahati, Bayu, Zulham (Lerby 64), Lilipaly, Rizky Pora (Ferdinand 73), Boaz. *Sent off: Abduh 90+5.*

2017 CONCACAF GOLD CUP QUALS

Caribbean zone play-off group

Played in Couva, Trinidad

Jan 4
Trinidad & Tobago 1 (Charles 81)
Surinam 2 (G Kwasie 76, Rozenblad 109)
Aet[1]. **HT:** 0-0. **90mins:** 1-1. **Ref:** Ward (SKN)
Trinidad & Tobago: Foncette - Abu Bakr, C Edwards, C Mitchell, David, Arcia (S Winchester 60), K George, Hector, N Lewis (Andrews 68), Charles (Gonzales 91), Roach (Boucaud 78).
Surinam: Kohinor - M Darson, Eind, G Faerber, G Kwasie, Kisoor (Maatrijk 56), Eduard, Diporedjo (Sedney 107), Juliaans (Rozenblad 71), Fer (Talea 83), Apai.

Jan 6
Surinam 2 (Apai 86, Eduard 90+1)
Haiti 4 (Herold 25, Jean-Baptiste 42, Desire 48, G Faerber og 80)
HT: 0-2. **Ref:** Rodriguez (Cub)
Surinam: Kohinor - M Darson, Eind, G Faerber, G Kwasie, Kisoor (Maatrijk 53), Eduard, Diporedjo (Talea 76), Juliaans, Fer (Rozenblad 53), Apai. *Sent off: G Kwasie 79.*
Haiti: Romondt - Pompee, Jean-Baptiste, Jerome, Christian, Aristide, Thuriere, Etienne (Ambroise 76), Belfort (Pierre-Louis 83), Herold (Louima 88), Desire.

Jan 8
Haiti 4 (Etienne 20, Belfort 39, 111, Jean-Baptiste 117)
Trinidad & Tobago 3 (S Winchester 1, 25, 113)
Aet[1]. **HT:** 2-2. **90mins:** 2-2. **Ref:** De Leca (Aru)
Haiti: Romondt - Pompee, Jean-Baptiste, Jerome, Christian, Aristide, Thuriere (Pierre-Louis 37), Etienne (P Pierre 92), Belfort (Ambroise 115), Herold, Desire.
Trinidad & Tobago: Foncette - Abu Bakr, C Edwards (A Jones 21), Ford (Hector 90), David, K George, N Lewis, Charles (Glen 58), Boucaud, Andrews (Caesar 69), S Winchester.

[1] Extra-time played because draws are not allowed in the Caribbean zone

CARIBBEAN ZONE: PLAY-OFF GROUP – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Haiti[1]	2	2	0	0	8	5	6
Surinam	2	1	0	1	4	5	3
Trinidad & Tob	2	0	0	2	4	6	0

[1] As winners, Haiti will now meet the 5th-placed Central American zone country (yet to be decided) in a play-off for a place in the 12-team Gold Cup finals

Confirmed Gold Cup finalists so far
North America zone: Canada, Mexico, United States (all automatic entrants)
Caribbean zone: Curacao, French Guiana, Jamaica, Martinique

CHINA CUP

Played in Nanning, China

Semi-finals

Jan10
China 0
Iceland 2 (Finnbogason 64, A Sigurdarson 88)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Kim Jong-hyeok (SKo)
China: Chi Wenyi - Fan Xiaodong, Yang Shanping, Gao Zhunyi, Cai Huikang, Mao Jianqing (Hu Rentian 46), Yin Hongbo (Chen Zhongliu 57), Deng Hanwen (Bai Jiajun 65), Chi Zhongguo, Cao Yunding (Wang Jingbin 80), Hui Jiakang (Wang Jinxian 72).
Iceland: Halldorsson - B Saevarsson, Arnason, Fjoluson, K Jonsson (Bodvarsson 59), Palsson, B Sigurdarson (O Omarsson 90), Sverrisson (A Sigurdarson 73), Smarason (Finnbogason 59), E Bjarnason (Karlsson 76), E Omarsson (A Gudmundsson 90).

Jan11
Chile 1 (Pinares 18)
Croatia 1 (Andrijasevic 77)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Fu (Chn)
Chile 4-1 on pens
Chile: Toselli - Opazo, P Diaz, Maripan, Beausejour, Carmona (Galdames 83), Pavez (Caroca 90+2), Pinares (Sagal 83), Fuenzalida (Ramos 70), Vargas, Valencia.
Croatia: Livakovic - Pivaric, Matas, Filipovic, Barac, Antolic, Situm (Barisic 64), Ozobic (Tudor 57), Misic, Andrijasevic (Ivanusec 90), Perosevic (Maric 57).

3rd-place match

Jan14
China 1 (Wang Jingbin 89)
Croatia 1 (Ivanusec 36)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Ko Hyung-jin (SKo)
China 4-3 on pens
China: Shi Xiaotian - Pei Shuai, Fan Xiaodong, Yang Shanping (Wang Jinxian 65), Gao Zhunyi (Feng Gang 46), Cai Huikang (Hu Rentian 46), Yin Hongbo, Deng Hanwen, Chi Zhongguo, Cui Min, Hui Jiakang (Wang Jingbin 75).
Croatia: Prskalo - Pivaric, Datkovic, Filipovic, Juranovic, Antolic (Perosevic 65), Misic, Barisic (Ozobic 90+1), Ivanusec (Matas 80), Tudor (Situm 68), Maric (Andrijasevic 46).

Final

Jan15
Iceland 0
Chile 1 (Sagal 18)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Ma (Chn)
Iceland: Kristinsson - Fjoluson, B Saevarsson (Bodvarsson 90), K Jonsson (V Jonsson 66), Arnason, E Bjarnason (Karlsson 77), Sverrisson (A Sigurdarson 66), Larusson (E Omarsson 56), Palsson (Smarason 80), B Sigurdarson, Finnbogason.
Chile: Toselli - Opazo, P Diaz, Maripan, Fuenzalida (Fernandes 79), Beausejour, Carmona (Galdames 70), Pavez, Sagal (Pinares 66), Valencia (Ampuero 90+1), Vargas.

FRIENDLIES

Tuesday, November 22
Nov 22 - St John's
Antigua & Barbuda 0
Estonia 1 (Marin 27)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Bassue (SKN)
Antigua & Barbuda: Muhammad - Jamarlie Stevens, Allen, Mack, Burton, T Thomas (Christian 67), Jahraldo-Martin, Phillip (Jacob 63), Kirwan (Francis 52), Smith, Byers (Javorn Stevens 77).
Estonia: Meerits - Mool, Baranov, Tamm, Elhi, Mets, Domov (Artjom Dmitrijev 46), Marin (Kams 65), Miller (Mosnikov 74), Toomet (Ojamaa 80), Purje (Henri Anier 74).

Monday, December 26
Dec 26 - Abidjan[1]
Ivory Coast 0
Zimbabwe 0
Ref: Dembele (IvC)
[1]Both teams comprised local players

Tuesday, December 27
Dec 27 - Managua
Nicaragua 2 (L Peralta 3, Cadena 47)
Trinidad & Tobago 1 (Arcia 76)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 4,000. **Ref:** Davila (Nic)
Nicaragua: Lorente - Copete, Casco, Quijano (Errington 37), Rosas (Veliz 88), M Lopez (E Tellez 90), L Peralta, Pinel (Jarquin 76), Cadena (Somarriba 57), B Garcia (Chavarria 46), N Lazo.
Trinidad & Tobago: Foncette - David, Abu Bakr, Ford, A Jones (Cyrus 80), C Edwards, Hector, N Lewis (Caesar 66), Arcia (Gonzales 78), Jomal Williams (Charles 54), Roach (Glen 54).

Friday, December 30
Dec 30 - Managua
Nicaragua 1 (Cadena 27)
Trinidad & Tobago 3 (Glen 39, C Mitchell 51, Andrews 70)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Davila (Nic)
Nicaragua: D Tellez - E Tellez, Copete (O Lopez 46), Quijano, L Peralta (J Coronel 46), Pinel (Barrera 67), Rosas, B Garcia (Jarquin 40), Moreno (Zepeda 65), Cadena (Bonilla 46), M Lopez.
Trinidad & Tobago: Foncette - Ford, Abu Bakr, C Mitchell, Charles (Jomal Williams 82), K George, Arcia (Cyrus 82), N Lewis (Andrews 55), C Edwards (Gonzales 70), Hector (A Jones 74), Glen (S Winchester 76).

Wednesday, January 4
Jan 4 - Tunis
Tunisia 2 (Lahmar 6, Yacoubi 47)
Uganda 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Sarr (Mra)
Tunisia: A Mathlouthi - H Mathlouthi (Meriah 67), Maaloul (Kchok 67), Yacoubi, S Ben Youssef, Sassi, Azouni, Lahmar, Sliti, Msakni (Bguir 67), Khenissi.
Uganda: Salim (Ochan 46) - Iguma, Batambuze (Walusimbi 46), Wasswa, Isinde (Awany 46), G Kizito, Mawejje (Mutyaba 46), Azira, Massa, Sentamu (Shaban 46), Lubega (Miya 46).

Thursday, January 5
Jan 5 - Yaounde
Cameroon 2 (Oyongo 54, Bassogog 66)
DR Congo 0
HT: 0-0
Cameroon: Ondoa (Goda 46) - Mabouka (Fai 64), Ngadeu, Teikeu (Djetei 71), Oyongo, Mandjeck, Djoum (Siani 46), N'Jie, Zoua (Ndip Tambe 46), Bassogog (Boya 76), Aboubakar (Moukandjo 46).
DR Congo: Kudimbana - Mpeko, Bokadi (Kebano 46), Bokila (Bolingi 60), Mubele (Kage 46), N'Sakala (Ikoko 46), Tisserand (Lomalisa 72), Bakambu (Maghoma 75), Mulumbu (Mbemba 46), Mulumba, M'Poku (Botaka 46).

Saturday, January 7
Jan 7 - Blida
Algeria 3 (Hanni 53, Bounedjah 73, Bentaleb 90+2)
Mauritania 1 (El Id pen 18)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 3,000. **Ref:** Traore (Mli)
Algeria: Asselah - Belkhiter, Mandi, Belkaroui (Bensebaini 46), Ghoulam (Mesbah 81), Taider, Abeid (Guedioura 72), Bentaleb, Ghezzal (Meftah 89), Bounedjah, Hanni.
Mauritania: Souleymane - Denna (Soudani 76), Diaw, Abeid, B N'Diaye, D Diarra, Dellahi, El Id (Bagili 84), Soueid (Gaye 57), Niass, I Diakhite.

Jan 7 - Marrakech, Morocco
Mali 1 (M Yatabare 70)
Burkina Faso 2 (Zongo 42, B Traore 59)
HT: 0-1
Mali: S Diakite (D Diarra 41; O Sissoko 60) - H Traore (O Coulibaly 34), C Traore (Konate 46), Y Sylla (L Coulibaly 46), K Coulibaly (Mamoutou N'Diaye 46), Sako (Marega 46), M Doumbia (Adama Traore 46), Wague (S Coulibaly 46), Bissouma (M Yatabare 46), Mahamadou N'Diaye (Kone 46), Sow (S Yatabare 46).
Burkina Faso: Koffi - B Kone (Koanda 46), Yago, Sare (Congo 46), C Kabore (Guira 46), Y Coulibaly (Malo 46), Nakoulma (Alain Traore 46), Pitroipa (Bayala 46), Zongo (B Toure 46), Abdou Traore (B Traore 46), Diawara (Bance 46).

Sunday, January 8
Jan 8 - Cairo
Egypt 1 (Mohsen 90+2)
Tunisia 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Al Hammadi (UAE)
Egypt: Ekramy (El Shenawy 46) - Hafez, Samir, Gabr, A Fathy (Elmohamady 61), El Nenny (I Salah 46), Hamed, Warda (Kahraba 70), Trezeguet, Sobhy (M Salah 70), Koka (Mohsen 46).
Tunisia: A Mathlouthi (Jridi 56) - Nagguez, S Ben Youssef, Yacoubi (Dhaouadi 59), Maaloul, Sliti, Lahmar, Sassi, Khazri (Azouni 17), Msakni, Akaichi (Khalifa 72).

Jan 8 - Brazzaville, Congo
Libya 1 (Ghanudi 68)
Senegal 2 (Sow 18, I Sarr 62)
HT: 0-1
Senegal: K N'Diaye - M'Bengue, Toure, Mbodj (Ciss 46), Gassama, Papakouli Diop, Saivet, P A N'Diaye (C N'Doye 55), Keita (Konate 70), I Sarr, Sow (Diedhiou 60).

Jan 8 - Abu Dhabi, UAE
Slovakia 1 (Vavro 57)
Uganda 3 (Oloya 5, Miya 15, Massa 77)
HT: 0-2. **Ref:** Al Marzooqi (UAE)
Slovakia: Sulla (Jakubech 46) - Kotula (Sulek 46), Vavro, Kralik, Holubek, Bukata (Huk 70), Gergel (Kacer 70), Skvarka, Orsula (Safranko 85), Malec (Guba 70), Hlohovsky.
Uganda: Odongkara - Wadada (Iguma 62), Ochaya, Awany, Wasswa (Jjuuko 46), G Kizito, Mawejje, Oloya (Massa 46), Luwagga (Walusimbi 82), Miya (Sentamu 62), Shaban (Aucho 62).

Jan 8 - Abu Dhabi, UAE
Sweden 1 (Kanon og 39)
Ivory Coast 2 (N'Guessan 45+1, Sio 50)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Al Jeneibi (UAE)
Sweden: Abrahamsson - Salomonsson, Brorsson, Wahlqvist, Konate (J Nilsson 46), Barkroth (Moberg Karlsson 62), K Olsson (Ghoddos 74), Lewicki (Allansson 74), Claesson, Andersson, Frick (Isak 62).
Ivory Coast: Gbohouo - Aurier (Bagayoko 77), Kessie, Kanon, A Traore, N'Guessan (Seri 46), Serey Die (Gradel 46), Pepe (Deli 46), Angban (Doukoure 46), Kalou (Zaha 46), Bony (Sio 46).

Monday, January 9
Jan 9 - Al Ain, UAE
Morocco 0
Finland 1 (J Ojala 45+1)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Al Marzooqi (UAE)
Morocco: El Kajoui - Ait Bennasser (Da Costa 46), Benatia, Saiss, Dirar, El Ahmadi, Boussoufa (Carcela 46), Fajr (El Kaddouri 46), Chafik, En-Nesyri (Bouhaddouz 26; Alioui 70), El Arabi (Boutaib 46).
Finland: Viitala - Arkivuo (Sumusalo 82), Halsti, J Ojala, Pirinen (Granlund 79), Hradecky, Mattila (Tuominen 73), Schuller (Kauko 65), Forsell (Taylor 56), T Vayrynen (Pelvas 85), Skrabb.

Tuesday, January 10
Jan10 - Sidi Moussa
Algeria 6 (Slimani x2, Mahrez, Brahimi, Taider, Soudani)
Mauritania 0
HT: 3-0
Algeria: (starting XI only) Asselah - Meftah, Mandi, Bensebaini, Ghoulam, Guedioura, Bentaleb, Mahrez, Brahimi, Soudani, Slimani.

Jan10 - Yaounde
Cameroon 1 (Moukandjo pen 28)
Zimbabwe 1 (Ndoro 14)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Juenkou (Cam)
Cameroon: Ondoa - Fai, N'Koulou, Teikeu (Ngadeu 46), Oyongo (Ngwem 62), Siani, Mandjeck (Djoum 46), Toko Ekambi (N'Jie 62), Salli (Bassogog 63), Moukandjo, Ndip Tambe (Zoua 46).
Zimbabwe: Mkuruva - Zvirekwi (Machapa 70), Nhamoinesu, Muroiwa, Bhasera (Kangwa 58), E Rusike (M Rusike 75), Katsande, Phiri, Mahachi (Billiat 65), Malajila (Mushekwi 65), Ndoro (Musona 67).

Jan10 - Abu Dhabi, UAE
Saudi Arabia 0
Slovenia 0
Ref: Al Jeneibi (UAE)
Saudi Arabia: Al Mosailem - Al Shahrani, Al Fatil, Omar Hawsawi, Kadesh (Al Harbi 90+1), Al Khaibri (Al Dossari 58), Al Abed, Al Jassim (Al Mogahwi 74), Al Shehri, Al Faraj (Al Ruwaili 75), Al Sahlawi (Al Shamrani 58).
Slovenia: Sorcan - Klinar (Sirok 46), Delamea Mlinar, Blazic, Sikosek, Vetrih, Zajc (Kronaveter 59), Majer (Lotric 67), Pucko (Arcon 89), Podlogar (Matjasic 46), Vuk (Bratanovic 46).

Wednesday, January 11
Jan11 - Brazzaville
Congo 0
Senegal 2 (Keita 19, P A N'Diaye 47)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Malala (DRC)
Congo: (starting XI only) Mouyabi - Okombi, Itoua, Kibamba, Imouele, Ankira, Madila, Gandze, Ipamy, Kangou, Tsiba.
Senegal: Diallo - Toure (Gassama 68), Kouyate (Mbodj 62), Koulibaly, Ciss, Papakouli Diop (Diame 66), P A N'Diaye (Saivet 54), Gueye, S Mane (Sow 83), M B Diouf, Keita (I Sarr 62).

Jan11 - Abu Dhabi, UAE
Ivory Coast 3 (Kodjia 51, Zaha 58, Aurier 72)
Uganda 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Al Hammadi (UAE)
Ivory Coast: Gbohouo - Aurier, Bailly, Kanon, A Traore (Deli 46), Serey Die, Kessie (Doukoure 64), Seri, Zaha (Gradel 69), Kalou (Pepe 69), Kodjia (Bony 64).
Uganda: Onyango (Odongkara 46) - Iguma (Wadada 61), Wasswa, Awany (Isinde 61), Ochaya, G Kizito, Azira, Miya (Oloya 46), Mawejje, Luwagga (Walusimbi 76), Massa (Shaban 61).

Thursday, January 12
Jan12 - Abu Dhabi, UAE
Sweden 6 (Isak 19, Moberg Karlsson 51, Andersson 59, 79, Frick 89, Ghoddos 90+2)
Slovakia 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Ali (Bhn)
Sweden: Linde - Wahlqvist, Tinnerholm (Salomonsson 76), J Nilsson (Dagerstal 60), J Larsson, Isak (Frick 71), Allansson, Lewicki (Sema 60), Claesson, Moberg Karlsson (Ghoddos 60), Andersson (Barkroth 85).
Slovakia: Dubravka - Sulek, Vavro, Kruzliak (Krivak 46), Conka, Huk, Kacer (Gergel 60), Skvarka (Bukata 46), Guba (Orsula 60), Safranko (Malec 60), Hlohovsky (Misak 46).

Friday, January 13
Jan13 - Abu Dhabi, UAE
Finland 0
Slovenia 2 (Kronaveter 12, Dobrovoljc 48)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** H Al Ali (UAE)
Finland: Viitala (Hilander 53) - Arkivuo (Pirinen 78), Kojola, Sumusalo, Sauli Vaisanen, Schuller, Kauko (Mattila 72), Taylor (Forsell 60), Tuominen (Skrabb 60), Pelvas, Markkanen (T Vayrynen 67).
Slovenia: Kotnik (Vodisek 46) - Sirok, Boben, Balkovec (Sikosek 81), Dobrovoljc, Kronaveter (Matjasic 60), Vetrih, Pucko (Kramaric 46), Zajc (Majer 46), Arcon, Bratanovic (Vuk 70).

Saturday, January 14
Jan14 - Abu Dhabi, UAE
Cambodia 2 (Laboravy 19, Sokpheng 38)
Saudi Arabia 7 (Al Shamrani pen 23, 28, 36, Al Sahlawi pen 49, pen 79, Sereyroth og 63, Al Ruwaili 80)
HT: 2-3. **Ref:** H Al Ali (UAE)
Cambodia: Sereyroth - Samoeun, Baraing, Visal (Meng 88), Kungsomrath (Sothearoth 66), Polroth, Suhana (Mizan 88), Sokpheng (Samnang 76), Phallin (Sodavid 76), Tola, Laboravy (Vahed 88).
Saudi Arabia: Al Owais (Abdullah 46) - Al Breik, Ahmad Asiri, Osama Hawsawi, Al Harbi, Al Jassim (Fallatah 46), Al Ruwaili, Al Khaibri (Al Abed 76), Abdulfattah Asiri (Al Sahlawi 46), Al Moasher (Al Najei 76), Al Shamrani (Al Mogahwi 46).

2019 AFRICAN NATIONS CUP QUALS

Preliminary round draw

Comoros v Mauritius
Djibouti v South Sudan
Sao Tome e Principe v Madagascar
1st & 2nd legs to be played Mar 20-28, 2017

● *The winners enter the group stage*

Group stage draw

Group A
Equatorial Guinea
Senegal
Sudan
Sao Tome e Principe OR Madagascar

Group B
Cameroon
Malawi
Morocco
Comoros OR Mauritius

Group C
Burundi
Gabon
Mali
Djibouti OR South Sudan

Group D
Algeria
Benin
Gambia
Togo

Group E
Libya
Nigeria
Seychelles
South Africa

Group F
Ethiopia
Ghana
Kenya
Sierra Leone

Group G
Congo
DR Congo
Liberia
Zimbabwe

Group H
Central African Republic
Guinea
Ivory Coast
Rwanda

Group I
Angola
Botswana
Burkina Faso
Mauritania

Group J
Egypt
Niger
Swaziland
Tunisia

Group K
Guinea-Bissau
Mozambique
Namibia
Zambia

Group L
Cape Verde Islands
Lesotho
Tanzania
Uganda

Matchdays: *2017 - Jun 5-13; 2018 - Mar19-27, Sep 3-11 (2 games), Oct 8-16, Nov 5-13*

● *The12 group winners and the 3 runners-up with the best record will qualify for the16-team finals. Hosts Cameroon qualify for the finals automatically but have been drawn into qualifying Group B. Should they win this group, the runners-up will qualify automatically for the finals; should Cameroon finish runners-up in their group, only the group winners will qualify for the finals (apart from Cameroon themselves) - i.e. the 3rd-placed country in Group B will not be considered for one of the 3 best runners-up places at the finals*

World Service

2018 WORLD CUP QUALIFIERS

AFRICA section

● *5 finals places available*

3rd round

Group A

WC QUALS – AFRICA – 3RD ROUND: GROUP A	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
DR Congo	2	2	0	0	6	1	6
Tunisia	2	2	0	0	3	0	6
Guinea	2	0	0	2	1	4	0
Libya	2	0	0	2	0	5	0

Aug 28 Guinea v Libya
Tunisia v DR Congo
Sep 2 DR Congo v Tunisia
Libya v Guinea
Oct 2 Guinea v Tunisia
Libya v DR Congo
Nov 6 DR Congo v Guinea
Tunisia v Libya

Group B

WC QUALS – AFRICA – 3RD ROUND: GROUP B	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Nigeria	2	2	0	0	5	2	6
Cameroon	2	0	2	0	2	2	2
Zambia	2	0	1	1	2	3	1
Algeria	2	0	1	1	2	4	1

Aug 28 Nigeria v Cameroon
Zambia v Algeria
Sep 2 Algeria v Zambia
Cameroon v Nigeria
Oct 2 Cameroon v Algeria
Nigeria v Zambia
Nov 6 Algeria v Nigeria
Zambia v Cameroon

Group C

WC QUALS – AFRICA – 3RD ROUND: GROUP C	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ivory Coast	2	1	1	0	3	1	4
Gabon	2	0	2	0	0	0	2
Morocco	2	0	2	0	0	0	2
Mali	2	0	1	1	1	3	1

Aug 28 Gabon v Ivory Coast
Morocco v Mali
Sep 2 Ivory Coast v Gabon
Mali v Morocco
Oct 2 Mali v Ivory Coast
Morocco v Gabon
Nov 6 Gabon v Mali
Ivory Coast v Morocco

Group D

WC QUALS – AFRICA – 3RD ROUND: GROUP D	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Burkina Faso	2	1	1	0	3	1	4
South Africa	2	1	1	0	3	2	4
Senegal	2	1	0	1	3	2	3
Cape Verde Is	2	0	0	2	0	4	0

Aug 28 Cape Verde Islands v South Africa
Senegal v Burkina Faso
Sep 2 Burkina Faso v Senegal
South Africa v Cape Verde Islands
Oct 2 Cape Verde Islands v Senegal
South Africa v Burkina Faso
Nov 6 Burkina Faso v Cape Verde Islands
Senegal v South Africa

Group E

WC QUALS – AFRICA – 3RD ROUND: GROUP E	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Egypt	2	2	0	0	4	1	6
Uganda	2	1	1	0	1	0	4
Ghana	2	0	1	1	0	2	1
Congo	2	0	0	2	1	3	0

Aug 28 Ghana v Congo
Uganda v Egypt
Sep 2 Congo v Ghana
Egypt v Uganda
Oct 2 Egypt v Congo
Uganda v Ghana
Nov 6 Congo v Uganda
Ghana v Egypt

Each team will play 6 games (3x2)

● *The 5 group winners will qualify for the finals*

ASIA section

● *4.5 finals places available*

3rd round

Group A

WC QUALS – ASIA – 3RD ROUND: GROUP A	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Iran	5	3	2	0	4	0	11
South Korea	5	3	1	1	8	6	10
Uzbekistan	5	3	0	2	5	3	9
Syria	5	1	2	2	1	2	5
Qatar	5	1	1	3	3	6	4
China	5	0	2	3	2	6	2

Mar 23 China v South Korea
Qatar v Iran
Syria v Uzbekistan
Mar 28 Iran v China
South Korea v Syria
Uzbekistan v Qatar
Jun 12 Iran v Uzbekistan
Jun 13 Qatar v South Korea
Syria v China
Aug 31 China v Uzbekistan
South Korea v Iran
Syria v Qatar
Sep 5 Iran v Syria
Qatar v China
Uzbekistan v South Korea

Group B

WC QUALS – ASIA – 3RD ROUND: GROUP B	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Saudi Arabia	5	3	1	1	9	5	10
Japan	5	3	1	1	8	5	10
Australia	5	2	3	0	8	5	9
UAE	5	3	0	2	7	6	9
Iraq	5	1	0	4	6	8	3
Thailand	5	0	1	4	3	12	1

Mar 23 Iraq v Australia
Thailand v Saudi Arabia
United Arab Emirates v Japan
Mar 28 Australia v United Arab Emirates
Japan v Thailand
Saudi Arabia v Iraq
Jun 8 Australia v Saudi Arabia
Jun 13 Iraq v Japan
Thailand v United Arab Emirates
Aug 31 Japan v Australia
Thailand v Iraq
United Arab Emirates v Saudi Arabia
Sep 5 Australia v Thailand
Iraq v United Arab Emirates
Saudi Arabia v Japan

Each team will play10 games (5x2)

● *The top 2 in both groups will qualify for the finals; the 2 3rd-placed countries will meet in the* **Asia section play-off**, *the winner of which will meet the 4th-placed CONCACAF country in a play-off for a place in the finals*

CONCACAF section

● *3.5 finals places available*

5th round

WC QUALS – CONCACAF – 5TH ROUND	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Costa Rica	2	2	0	0	6	0	6
Mexico	2	1	1	0	2	1	4
Panama	2	1	1	0	1	0	4
Honduras	2	1	0	1	3	2	3
Trinidad & Tob	2	0	0	2	1	5	0
United States	2	0	0	2	1	6	0

Mar 24 Mexico v Costa Rica
Trinidad & Tobago v Panama
United States v Honduras
Mar 28 Honduras v Costa Rica
Panama v United States
Trinidad & Tobago v Mexico
Jun 8 Costa Rica v Panama
Mexico v Honduras
United States v Trinidad & Tobago
Jun 11 Mexico v United States
Jun 13 Costa Rica v Trindad & Tobago
Panama v Honduras
Sep 1 Mexico v Panama
Trinidad & Tobago v Honduras
United States v Costa Rica
Sep 5 Costa Rica v Mexico
Honduras v United States
Panama v Trinidad & Tobago
Oct 6 Costa Rica v Honduras
Mexico v Trinidad & Tobago
United States v Panama
Oct 10 Honduras v Mexico
Panama v Costa Rica
Trinidad & Tobago v United States

Each team will play10 games (5x2)

● *The top 3 will qualify for the finals; the 4th-placed country will meet the winner of the Asia section play-off in a play-off for a place in the finals*

EUROPE section

● *13 finals places available (excluding the place for hosts* **Russia**, *who qualify automatically)*

Group A

WC QUALS – EUROPE – GROUP A	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
France	4	3	1	0	7	2	10
Holland	4	2	1	1	8	4	7
Sweden	4	2	1	1	6	3	7
Bulgaria	4	2	0	2	6	10	6
Belarus	4	0	2	2	2	6	2
Luxembourg	4	0	1	3	5	9	1

Mar 25 Bulgaria v Holland
Luxembourg v France
Sweden v Belarus
Jun 9 Belarus v Bulgaria
Holland v Luxembourg
Sweden v France
Aug 31 Bulgaria v Sweden
France v Holland
Luxembourg v Belarus
Sep 3 Belarus v Sweden
France v Luxembourg
Holland v Bulgaria
Oct 7 Belarus v Holland
Bulgaria v France
Sweden v Luxembourg
Oct 10 France v Belarus
Holland v Sweden
Luxembourg v Bulgaria

Group B

WC QUALS – EUROPE – GROUP B	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Switzerland	4	4	0	0	9	3	12
Portugal	4	3	0	1	16	3	9
Hungary	4	2	1	1	8	3	7
Faroe Islands	4	1	1	2	2	8	4
Latvia	4	1	0	3	2	8	3
Andorra	4	0	0	4	1	13	0

Mar 25 Andorra v Faroe Islands
Portugal v Hungary
Switzerland v Latvia
Jun 9 Andorra v Hungary
Faroe Islands v Switzerland
Latvia v Portugal
Aug 31 Hungary v Latvia
Portugal v Faroe Islands
Switzerland v Andorra
Sep 3 Faroe Islands v Andorra
Hungary v Portugal
Latvia v Switzerland
Oct 7 Andorra v Portugal
Faroe Islands v Latvia
Switzerland v Hungary
Oct 10 Hungary v Faroe Islands
Latvia v Andorra
Portugal v Switzerland

Group C

WC QUALS – EUROPE – GROUP C	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Germany	4	4	0	0	16	0	12
N Ireland	4	2	1	1	8	2	7
Azerbaijan	4	2	1	1	2	4	7
Czech Rep	4	1	2	1	2	4	5
Norway	4	1	0	3	5	7	3
San Marino	4	0	0	4	1	17	0

Mar 26 Azerbaijan v Germany
Northern Ireland v Norway
San Marino v Czech Republic
Jun 10 Azerbaijan v Northern Ireland
Germany v San Marino
Norway v Czech Republic
Sep 1 Czech Republic v Germany
Norway v Azerbaijan
San Marino v Northern Ireland
Sep 4 Azerbaijan v San Marino
Germany v Norway
Northern Ireland v Czech Republic
Oct 5 Azerbaijan v Czech Republic
Northern Ireland v Germany
San Marino v Norway
Oct 8 Czech Republic v San Marino
Germany v Azerbaijan
Norway v Northern Ireland

Group D

WC QUALS – EUROPE – GROUP D	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Rep Ireland	4	3	1	0	7	3	10
Serbia	4	2	2	0	9	5	8
Wales	4	1	3	0	8	4	6
Austria	4	1	1	2	6	7	4
Georgia	4	0	2	2	3	5	2
Moldova	4	0	1	3	2	11	1

Mar 24 Austria v Moldova
Georgia v Serbia
Republic of Ireland v Wales
Jun 11 Moldova v Georgia
Republic of Ireland v Austria
Serbia v Wales
Sep 2 Georgia v Republic of Ireland
Serbia v Moldova
Wales v Austria
Sep 5 Austria v Georgia
Moldova v Wales
Republic of Ireland v Serbia
Oct 6 Austria v Serbia
Georgia v Wales
Republic of Ireland v Moldova
Oct 9 Moldova v Austria
Serbia v Georgia
Wales v Republic of Ireland

Group E

WC QUALS – EUROPE – GROUP E	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Poland	4	3	1	0	10	5	10
Montenegro	4	2	1	1	9	4	7
Denmark	4	2	0	2	7	5	6
Romania	4	1	2	1	6	4	5
Armenia	4	1	0	3	4	10	3
Kazakhstan	4	0	2	2	3	11	2

Mar 26 Armenia v Kazakhstan
Montenegro v Poland
Romania v Denmark
Jun 10 Kazakhstan v Denmark
Montenegro v Armenia
Poland v Romania
Sep 1 Denmark v Poland
Kazakhstan v Montenegro
Romania v Armenia
Sep 4 Armenia v Denmark
Montenegro v Romania
Poland v Kazakhstan
Oct 5 Armenia v Poland
Montenegro v Denmark
Romania v Kazakhstan
Oct 8 Denmark v Romania
Kazakhstan v Armenia
Poland v Montenegro

Group F

WC QUALS – EUROPE – GROUP F	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
England	4	3	1	0	6	0	10
Slovenia	4	2	2	0	4	2	8
Slovakia	4	2	0	2	7	2	6
Lithuania	4	1	2	1	5	7	5
Scotland	4	1	1	2	6	8	4
Malta	4	0	0	4	1	10	0

Mar 26 England v Lithuania
Malta v Slovakia
Scotland v Slovenia
Jun 10 Lithuania v Slovakia
Scotland v England
Slovenia v Malta
Sep 1 Lithuania v Scotland
Malta v England
Slovakia v Slovenia
Sep 4 England v Slovakia
Scotland v Malta
Slovenia v Lithuania
Oct 5 England v Slovenia
Malta v Lithuania
Scotland v Slovakia
Oct 8 Lithuania v England
Slovakia v Malta
Slovenia v Scotland

Group G

WC QUALS – EUROPE – GROUP G	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Spain	4	3	1	0	15	1	10
Italy	4	3	1	0	11	4	10
Israel	4	3	0	1	8	5	9
Albania	4	2	0	2	4	6	6
Macedonia	4	0	0	4	4	11	0
Liechtenstein	4	0	0	4	1	16	0

Mar 24 Italy v Albania
Liechtenstein v Macedonia
Spain v Israel
Jun 11 Israel v Albania
Italy v Liechtenstein
Macedonia v Spain
Sep 2 Albania v Liechtenstein
Israel v Macedonia
Spain v Italy
Sep 5 Italy v Israel
Liechtenstein v Spain
Macedonia v Albania
Oct 6 Italy v Macedonia
Liechtenstein v Israel
Spain v Albania
Oct 9 Albania v Italy
Israel v Spain
Macedonia v Liechtenstein

Group H

WC QUALS – EUROPE – GROUP H	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Belgium	4	4	0	0	21	1	12
Greece	4	3	1	0	9	2	10
Bosnia-Herz	4	2	1	1	8	5	7
Cyprus	4	1	0	3	3	8	3
Estonia	4	1	0	3	5	15	3
Gibraltar	4	0	0	4	2	17	0

Mar 25 Belgium v Greece
Bosnia-Herzegovina v Gibraltar
Cyprus v Estonia
Jun 9 Bosnia-Herzegovina v Greece
Estonia v Belgium
Gibraltar v Cyprus
Aug 31 Belgium v Gibraltar
Cyprus v Bosnia-Herzegovina
Greece v Estonia
Sep 3 Estonia v Cyprus
Gibraltar v Bosnia-Herzegovina
Greece v Belgium
Oct 7 Bosnia-Herzegovina v Belgium
Cyprus v Greece
Gibraltar v Estonia
Oct 10 Belgium v Cyprus
Estonia v Bosnia-Herzegovina
Greece v Gibraltar

Group I

WC QUALS – EUROPE – GROUP I	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Croatia	4	3	1	0	10	1	10
Ukraine	4	2	2	0	7	3	8
Iceland	4	2	1	1	6	5	7
Turkey	4	1	2	1	5	5	5
Finland	4	0	1	3	3	6	1
Kosovo	4	0	1	3	1	12	1

Mar 24 Croatia v Ukraine
Kosovo v Iceland
Turkey v Finland
Jun 11 Finland v Ukraine
Iceland v Croatia
Kosovo v Turkey
Sep 2 Croatia v Kosovo
Finland v Iceland
Ukraine v Turkey
Sep 5 Iceland v Ukraine
Kosovo v Finland
Turkey v Croatia
Oct 6 Croatia v Finland
Kosovo v Ukraine
Turkey v Iceland
Oct 9 Finland v Turkey
Iceland v Kosovo
Ukraine v Croatia

Each team will play10 games (5x2)

● *The 9 group winners will qualify for the finals; the 8 runners-up with the best record (against the countries finishing1st, 3rd, 4th & 5th in the respective groups) will be paired in 4 play-offs, the winners of which will also qualify for the finals*

OCEANIA section

● *0.5 finals places available*

3rd round

Group A

WC QUALS – OCEANIA – 3RD ROUND: GROUP A	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
New Zealand	2	1	1	0	2	0	4
New Caledonia	2	0	1	1	0	2	1
Fiji	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Mar 25 Fiji v New Zealand
Mar 28 New Zealand v Fiji
Jun 5 Fiji v New Caledonia
Jun 13 New Caledonia v Fiji

Group B

WC QUALS – OCEANIA – 3RD ROUND: GROUP B	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Tahiti[1]	2	1	0	1	3	1	3
Solomon Is[1]	2	1	0	1	1	3	3
Papua NG	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

[1]*The Tahiti v Solomon Islands game played on Nov 7, 2016 – which Tahiti won1-0 – has now been awarded as a 3-0 win to Tahiti because Solomon Islands fielded an ineligible player*

Mar 20 Papua New Guinea v Tahiti
Mar 27 Tahiti v Papua New Guinea
Jun 5 Solomon Islands v Papua New Guinea
Jun 13 Papua New Guinea v Solomon Islands

Each team will play 4 games (2x2)

● *The 2 group winners will meet in a play-off (the* **Oceania play-off round***), the winner of which will meet the 5th-placed South American country in a play-off for a place in the finals*

SOUTH AMERICA section

● *4.5 finals places available*

WC QUALS – SOUTH AMERICA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Brazil	12	8	3	1	28	9	27
Uruguay	12	7	2	3	24	11	23
Ecuador	12	6	2	4	22	16	20
Chile[1]	12	6	2	4	21	17	20
Argentina	12	5	4	3	14	12	19
Colombia	12	5	3	4	15	15	18
Paraguay	12	4	3	5	11	17	15
Peru[1]	12	4	2	6	18	20	14
Bolivia[1]	12	2	1	9	10	31	7
Venezuela	12	1	2	9	14	29	5

[1]*Bolivia fielded an ineligible player in 2 previous qualifiers, a 2-0 win over Peru and a 0-0 draw with Chile. The ties have now been awarded as 3-0 wins to Peru and Chile*

Mar 23 Argentina v Chile
Colombia v Bolivia
Paraguay v Ecuador
Uruguay v Brazil
Venezuela v Peru
Mar 28 Bolivia v Argentina
Brazil v Paraguay
Chile v Venezuela
Ecuador v Colombia
Peru v Uruguay
Aug 31 Brazil v Ecuador
Chile v Paraguay
Peru v Bolivia
Uruguay v Argentina
Venezuela v Colombia
Sep 5 Argentina v Venezuela
Bolivia v Chile
Colombia v Brazil
Ecuador v Peru
Paraguay v Uruguay
Oct 5 Argentina v Peru
Bolivia v Brazil
Chile v Ecuador
Colombia v Paraguay
Venezuela v Uruguay
Oct 10 Brazil v Chile
Ecuador v Argentina
Paraguay v Venezuela
Peru v Colombia
Uruguay v Bolivia

Each team will play18 games (9x2)

● *The top 4 will qualify for the finals; the 5th-placed country will meet the Oceania play-off round winner in a play-off for a place in the finals*

All qualifying fixtures shown are 2017

2017 CONFEDERATIONS CUP

To be played in Russia

Draw & match schedule

Group A

Mexico
New Zealand
Portugal
Russia

Jun 17 Russia v New Zealand (St Petersburg)
Jun 18 Portugal v Mexico (Kazan)
Jun 21 Russia v Portugal (Moscow)
Mexico v New Zealand (Sochi)
Jun 24 Mexico v Russia (Kazan)
New Zealand v Portugal (St Petersburg)

Group B

Australia
Chile
Germany
African champions

Jun 18 *African champions* v Chile (Moscow)
Jun 19 Australia v Germany (Sochi)
Jun 22 *African champions* v Australia (St P'burg)
Germany v Chile (Kazan)
Jun 25 Germany v *African champions* (Sochi)
Chile v Australia (Moscow)

● *The top 2 in both groups will qualify for the semi-finals*

Semi-finals

Jun 28 Gp A 1st v Gp B 2nd (Kazan)
Jun 29 Gp B 1st v Gp A 2nd (Sochi)

3rd-place match

Jul 2 (Moscow)

Final

Jul 2 (St Petersburg)

FRIENDLY FIXTURES (selected)

Saturday, January 29
United States v Serbia (San Diego)
Saturday, February 4
United States v Jamaica (Chattanooga)
Wednesday, February 8
Mexico v Iceland (Whitney, USA)
Sunday, February 12
Uzbekistan v Armenia (Antalya, Tur)
Thursday, February 16
Honduras v Jamaica (Houston, USA)
Wednesday, February 22
Ecuador v Honduras (Quito)
San Marino v Andorra (Serravalle)
Monday, March 20
San Marino v Moldova (Serravalle)
Wednesday, March 22
Cyprus v Kazakhstan (Nicosia)
Czech Republic v Lithuania (Usti Nad Labem)
Germany v England (Dortmund)
Monday, March 27
Turkey v Moldova (Eskisehir)
Tuesday, March 28
Austria v Finland (Innsbruck)
France v Spain (Paris)
Holland v Italy (Amsterdam)
Republic of Ireland v Iceland (Dublin)
Russia v Belgium (Sochi)
Thursday, June 1
Switzerland v Belarus (Neuchatel)
Sunday, June 4
Republic of Ireland v Uruguay (Dublin)
Tuesday, June 6
Denmark v Germany (Copenhagen)
Wednesday, June 7
Italy v Uruguay (Nice, France)
Tuesday, June 13
France v England (Paris)

● *Friendly fixtures subject to change*

KEY TO TABLES
(C) = champions
(R) = relegated
(Q) = qualified for next stage

February 2017 Vol 57 No 6

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World Soccer's GREAT MATCHES

JULY 2, 2000, HOLLAND: EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIP FINAL

France 2 Italy 1 (aet)

World champions claim European title with dramatic "golden goal" from David Trezeguet

Impact...*Les Bleus* sub Sylvain Wiltord

World Cup winners on home soil two years earlier, *Les Bleus* became the first world champions to lift the European title.

The Euro 2000 Final in Rotterdam was settled by David Trezeguet's "golden goal", although Keir Radnedge, writing in the July 2000 edition of *World Soccer*, felt "victory for France was, of course, desperately cruel to an Italian team who threw themselves with equal attacking gusto into a hectic start when both sides appeared desperate for an early resolution".

Thierry Henry "ran the legs off Italy's superb defenders" according to Radnedge, but it was the *Azzurri* who scored first, through Marco Delvecchio.

"At that phase of the game," commented Radnedge, "it looked increasingly like Italy's night. Del Piero and Delvecchio had more chances to increase Italy's lead."

Italy keeper Francesco Toldo had been outstanding but was eventually beaten in one of the most dramatic endings to a major international tournament.

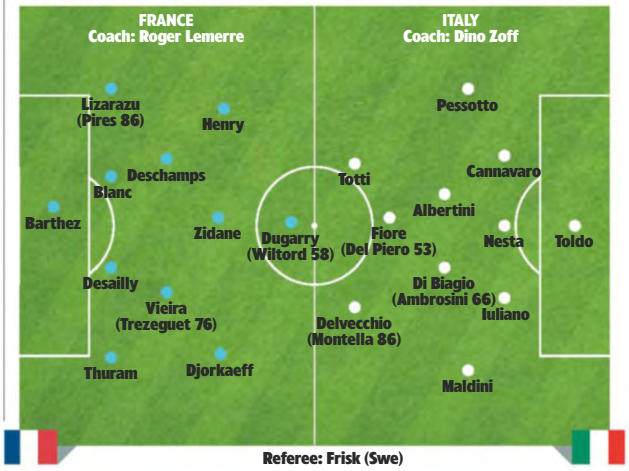
"As the minutes ticked by, it appeared France, having lost their shape, had also lost hope," noted Radnedge. "[France coach Roger] Lemerre threw on attacking substitutes Sylvain Wiltord, David Trezeguet and Robert Pires, and the result appeared to be tactical chaos.

Champion...skipper Didier Deschamps

"But finally, in overtime, Wiltord found space, cut in from the left as Italy fluffed a clearance and, at last, Toldo was beaten.

As the game entered an extra half-hour in which the first goal would win the game, Radnedge sensed a weakness in Dino Zoff's team, explaining that "Italy were shipping water" as "France tore open a gash down the left wing and sent Pires stabbing in, time and again".

And so it was from a Pires cross that Trezeguet volleyed home the "golden goal" to crown France the kings of Europe. WS



Referee: Frisk (Swe)

KEY MOMENTS

All white...Marco Delvecchio puts Italy ahead

6min Thierry Henry's curling shot beats Italy keeper Francesco Toldo but hits the post.

17min Following a foul on Didier Deschamps, Demetrio Albertini's free-kick clips the France crossbar.

39min Henry's through ball is prodded towards goal by Youri Djorkaeff, but Toldo saves.

55min A short Italy corner and a clever backheel from Francesco Totti finds Gianluca Pessotto, whose cross is turned in from close range by Marco Delvecchio. **0-1**

62min Toldo saves with his legs from Sylvain Wiltord.

69min Another great save by Toldo as he thwarts Henry.

90min A header by David Trezeguet finds Wiltord, who fires left-footed under the arm of Toldo. **1-1**

101min In extra time, Zinedine Zidane meets Robert Pires' cross with an acrobatic volley but his effort is deflected for a corner.

103min After Pires beats Fabio Cannavaro and crosses from the byline, Trezeguet turns and fires home the winner from 10 yards. **2-1**

Golden...David Trezeguet scores the winner

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